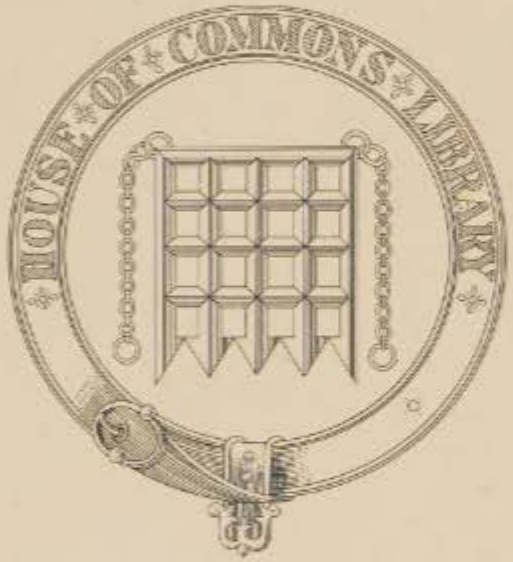

8 JUL 1991

155
CATALOGUED
R Prisons
LBECK

TO BE
DISPOSED
BY
AUTHORITY

House of Commons Library
54056000585205

RUSSIAN PURGE

and

The Extraction of Confession

by

F. BECK and W. GODIN

Translated from the German original by
ERIC MOSBACHER AND DAVID PORTER

Publishers

since 1812

HURST & BLACKETT LTD
London New York Melbourne Sydney Cape Town

First published 1951

Printed in Great Britain
by The Anchor Press, Ltd.,
Tiptree, Essex

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

For their own safety and that of many close friends and former colleagues living in the U.S.S.R. and other countries beyond the Iron Curtain, the authors must conceal their identity under pseudonyms. The authenticity of their experience has, however, been checked as well as their scientific authority, not only from their papers published in the U.S.S.R. and elsewhere but also from a number of celebrated scientists, including several Nobel prizewinners. Of their *bona fides* there can be no possible doubt.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/russianpurgeextr0000beck

CONTENTS

		Page
	Publishers' Note	5
	Authors' Introduction	9
Chapter I	The Party Line	13
II	Lull before the Storm	21
III	The Iron Commissar	27
IV	Interrogation	43
V	Prison Life	58
VI	The Prisoners	80
	The Categories	
	(1) The Party Organization	89
	(2) Red Partisans, Old Bolsheviks and Political Convicts	93
	(3) The Army	94
	(4) The Transport Organization	98
	(5) Technicians and Specialists	99
	(6) Foreigners and "Foreign Agents"	102
	(*a*) Genuine Foreigners	102
	(*b*) "Foreign Agents"	113
	(i) Native Foreigners	113
	(ii) Soviet Citizens who had been abroad	114
	(iii) Those having cultural relations with foreign countries	115
	(iv) Those who had engaged in correspondence with foreign countries	117

		Page
	(v) Those who had had dealings with foreigners	118
	(vi) Ex-prisoners of war	119
	(vii) Foreign settlers	120
	(viii) "Frontier-jumpers"	123
	(ix) Real spies	123
	(7) Members of National Minorities	125
	(8) The "Has-Beens"	127
	(9) People Associated with Celebrities	131
	(10) Cases of Mistaken Identity	132
	(11) The NKVD Organization	132
Chapter VII	Three Cases	148
VIII	The Theories	182
	(1) The Official Theory	184
	(2) The "Fascist" Theory	189
	(3) The Labour Force Theory	191
	(4) The Job Theory	192
	(5) The Theory of Social Prophylaxis	192
	(6) The Snowball Theory	200
	(7) The "Plan and Counter-Plan" Theory	200
	(8) The Retribution Theory	202
	(9) The Sunspot Theory	202
	(10) The Theory of the Israelites in the Wilderness	203
	(11) The Whipping-Boy Theory	205
	(12) The Party-Struggle Theory	206
	(13) The Bonapartist Theory	208
	(14) The Caesarean Persecution-Mania Theory	209
	(15) The Theory of Neo-Absolutism	210
	(16) The Theory of Social Supply	217
	(17) The Asia Theory	226

AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION

No event in recent history so tremendous as the Russian purge of 1936–39 has remained apparently so incomprehensible. To the Soviet people, and to the two authors of this work, who were among its victims, the purge still seems utterly fantastic. What chance, then, has the non-Soviet world of forming a true picture of those extraordinary years? Nevertheless they seem to us to be of outstanding importance for the proper understanding of Russian Communism and the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union carefully isolates itself from the outside world, and tries to hide everything that in the Government's opinion should be hidden and to reveal only what it wishes to reveal. Innumerable attempts to penetrate the veil have been made. Friends and enemies of Communism, eye-witnesses and casual observers, have all put pen to paper. Yet little is known in Europe and America of its true present-day character. Impressions are vague and confused, and bear little or no relation to reality. Hostile reports have only too often been vitiated by sensationalism or blind prejudice or hatred or preconceived ideas, or have been written under the stress of cruel experience.

The authors have no propagandist or popularizing intentions. They deliberately avoid putting forward any conclusions and generalizations in a more than tentative manner. The facts are far too complicated, and we are still far too close to them, for any attempt at a final evaluation. The authors also deliberately refrain from making any moral or political judgments. Their object is to present a factual picture and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

An understanding of the Soviet system and of Soviet life and conditions is made the more difficult by the fact that it is so full of paradoxes and contradictions. Among these the Soviet people themselves have difficulty in finding their way. To foreigners they are often completely unintelligible.

This book was written by two men whom chance threw together in a Soviet prison, and is the result of months of discussion in a cell. The two authors differ in nationality, career and outlook, and perhaps their differences made a certain objectivity easier for them. One is a historian and the other a scientist. The sharing of a professional prejudice in favour of objectivity may have been valuable in encouraging them carefully to tabulate and check their observations and to be cautious in drawing conclusions.

"For I know no other land where
a man may breathe so free."
(*From a Russian song of the thirties*)

CHAPTER I

THE PARTY LINE

One of the characteristic features of Communism and Soviet life is that it runs in phases. Periods of undernourishment or even starvation alternate with periods of relative apparent prosperity; periods of harsh measures and extreme political and administrative pressure alternate with periods of relative liberalism and peace. This is one of the factors that contribute to the extreme inconsistency of travellers' and eye-witnesses' reports.

Another factor is the great difference in standards of living between town and country, sometimes even between different districts of the same town, and between different classes and groups of the population, which is made possible by the complete control exercised by organs of the Soviet régime, which permits it at pleasure to direct food and other consumer goods to any desired point.

Before devoting ourselves to our subject, the great purge of the Yezhov period between 1936–39, let us cast a quick glance at the events that preceded it. At the end of the twenties a new phase of Soviet development set in. The phase of collectivization and the first Five-Year Plan, *i.e.*, forcible, full-scale industrialization, succeeded Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). The beginning of this phase was marked by the end of internal party discussion and Stalin's triumph over his opponents, Trotsky on the one hand and Bukharin on the other.

The first Five-Year Plan and the execution of the collectivization policy resulted in a deterioration of the well-being of all classes of the population. The deterioration set in gradually, but then gained steadily in momentum. The import of consumer goods was almost completely stopped in favour of machinery and material for the construction of heavy industry, and these were paid for by exports of food and raw materials, which had to be withdrawn from internal consumption. Increasing propaganda

for collectivization of the land was accompanied by an increasing decline in agricultural production, which culminated, after the harvest of 1932, in a famine far more terrible than that of 1921, which followed the civil war. This famine was not attributable to natural causes, *e.g.*, drought, but simply and solely to the Government's administrative measures. The official party version was that the wealthier peasants, the so-called kulaks, had persuaded the other peasants to slaughter their cattle and to neglect their fields, in other words that the famine was the result of deliberate sabotage by counter-revolutionary elements, aimed at the overthrow of the Soviet Government and the reintroduction of capitalism. At the same time the Soviet authorities flatly denied the existence of the famine while it was at its height. "Temporary local supply difficulties" were quoted and attributed to sabotage, and numerous "show" trials were held at which the accused made suitable confessions.

The authorities succeeded in confining the famine to the country, and saw to it that the towns had a bare minimum to eat. The result was that death from starvation was rare in the towns and restricted in their immediate neighbourhood. Many party members and officials who were sent into the country to collect food for the towns and to supervise its delivery by the peasants attributed the famine to the forcible methods of collection imposed by the party, which frequently deprived the peasants of their seed-corn. All officials were explicitly forbidden, though not in writing, to keep count of the deaths from starvation, and this makes it difficult to estimate the true extent of the famine. The non-Soviet world still remembers the 1921 famine, which followed the civil war, but is to a large extent unaware of the far greater famine of 1933. This was no doubt partly because foreign observers, who visited the towns and travelled through the country by train—one of the authors was among them—saw no visible signs of starvation, except for children begging at the stations, and a large part of the urban population heard only vague rumours of what was happening in the villages. Also, certain foreign newspapers had always reported signs of acute famine, even in times

of comparative prosperity, so that in 1933, when well-informed correspondents reported a famine again, there were many by whom their reports were simply disbelieved.

After the reintroduction of a free market for agricultural produce in excess of the obligatory deliveries "at prices governed by the market", the famine ended surprisingly quickly. A large part of the urban population, workers and students, were ordered on to the land to help with the sowing, and seed-corn was returned to the land. By the spring of 1933 many peasants were too weak to help with the sowing, but the good harvest which followed led to a quick recovery, and the result was that two years later it was possible to discontinue food rationing altogether.

The first Five-Year Plan, industrialization and collectivization were accompanied by a phase of unprecedented political coercion.

The collectivization of millions of peasant holdings was accompanied by the liquidation of the kulaks. A "kulak" —literally "fist"—is defined in Soviet terminology as an "exploiting peasant", *i.e.*, one who employs others. It should be remembered, however, that with the dividing up of the land in 1917 an almost universal levelling in its ownership had already taken place, and in the years preceding collectivization the remaining prosperous peasants, in the western sense, had already been accounted for. In South Russia a peasant counted as a prosperous peasant if he owned more than one horse, one cow, and more than five hectares of land, *i.e.*, a little more than twelve acres.

The bulk of those liquidated, however, did not correspond with any legal definition, but were recruited mainly from two large groups. The first consisted of peasants who had acquired no additional land at the time of its redistribution but had succeeded in working themselves up to a certain degree of prosperity during the NEP period. The second consisted of those who, apart altogether from their economic position, refused or hesitated to enter the collective economy. The liquidation of the kulaks brought ruin to innumerable peasant families. In some cases all the male members of the family were arrested or deported, or more frequently the whole family was "resettled", *i.e.*, forced to

leave all its property behind, transported to Siberia or the far north and told to make the best of it.

While these measures were ensuring the carrying out of the party's agrarian policy in spite of any peasant opposition, the carrying out of another part of the Five-Year Plan made indispensable the co-operation of another section of the population. Compulsory industrialization required the unqualified co-operation of the intelligentzia, particularly of the technical intelligentzia.

It is widely believed abroad that the Russian intelligentzia was completely wiped out by the October Revolution. This is an entirely false impression, created by the emigration from Russia that took place between 1918 and 1922. By and large, only relatively narrow circles of the intelligentzia were affected by emigration and "liquidation", namely the nobility, the landowners and wealthier merchants, the higher officials, the higher levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, army officers and industrialists. But even these were only affected to the extent that they offered active resistance to the Revolution—in the civil war, for instance—or were suspected of doing so. The greater part of the intelligentzia still survived. Many former nobles and great landowners and generals were to be found in Soviet enterprises, generally as clerks, messengers and the like.

On the other hand the scientific and technical intelligentzia, particularly the more highly qualified technicians, enjoyed from the outset the high respect and even the most far-reaching encouragement of the Soviet régime, though, like the rest of the community, they were subject to strict political control. Yet the majority of these people were by no means in favour of the régime in general or of the course steered by Stalin in particular, and the Government found itself obliged from about 1929 onwards to resort to coercion and repressive measures to stamp out the possibility of even passive resistance in these quarters, especially in the case of leading technicians and engineers. A large number of engineers belonging to the old intelligentzia were arrested, and soon after they had made the required confessions they were released again, whether or not they had

been condemned to long terms of imprisonment. Several big "show" trials of members of an alleged "industrial party" took place, in which engineers and professors were involved. The accused were almost invariably charged with sabotage and subversive activity, in the real existence of which only very few members of the Soviet intelligentzia believed. Several thousand engineers, technicians, agricultural and forestry experts, doctors and scientists fell victim to this purge, which did not last very long. After their confessions most of them were soon set free and even reappointed to important positions.

The Government thus achieved its aim of breaking all possible resistance to its policy. The engineers of the Soviet Union were taught to accommodate themselves to Government orders without arguing, even when they regarded them as unwise or technically unsound.

An important characteristic of industrialization in Russia must be pointed out in this connection. Any technical or economic Government measure which becomes the subject of extensive propaganda becomes a fetish. At the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan, for instance, several agricultural experts tried to point out that the answer to the question whether tractors or draught-cattle should be used in agriculture depended on local circumstances and on such factors as the availability of oil and spare parts, and should not automatically be decided in favour of tractors all over the Soviet Union. This was a technical point on which we are not qualified to express an opinion, but the official answer was by no means technical or economic. Those who made it were denounced as reactionaries, as enemies of the tractor, which had become an end in itself, a fetish, a symbol of the new age. After the purge all objections, even technical ones, to anything the Government had made a matter of principle had become impossible. The "plan" had become an end in itself. Soviet plans, incidentally, are always minimum plans. In properly planned production exceeding one's quota can, of course, have as serious an effect, by reason of its repercussions on other branches of production, as falling short of it, but in the Soviet Union exceeding a quota is automatically greeted with enthusiasm,

even if it has been bought at the expense of deficiencies elsewhere.

"Clean-ups" in the party and among Government officials, in scientific institutes, universities and industrial undertakings, simultaneously served the purpose of breaking all opposition.

One of the commonest and most effective means of bringing pressure to bear was the "clean-up" (*chistka*). A "clean-up" might result in anybody's being expelled, or, as it was called, "cleaned out", from the party, from his office or from his factory. There were also milder "organizational measures", as they were called, including simple or severe reprimand, temporary or permanent exclusion from one's trade union, or being down-graded. Every factory, office or institution held "clean-up" meetings at which such measures were imposed, usually by a unanimous vote proposed by the party representative.

The grounds for being "cleaned out" were usually social origin, frequently under the pretext of concealment of social origin, political passivity, former membership of another political party, or former support of opposition within the party; or it might just take the form of the very broad accusation of political unreliability; and it might take other forms as well. In many cases expulsion was the prelude to arrest. For the educated classes in the Soviet Union, specialists, party members and officials, being "cleaned out" was roughly the equivalent of the liquidation of the kulaks for the peasants.

The various processes of the so-called *prorabotka* ("check-up") and "criticism and self-criticism" were also applied to Soviet citizens in the academic world.

Scientific and artistic work and all academic instruction was subjected to severe criticism with the object of detecting to what extent there might have been any deviation from the principles of Marxism-Leninism, *i.e.*, from the official and currently valid party line. The concept of the general party line is of enormous significance in Soviet life; it is dragged into everything, even into people's private lives.

How broadly it is interpreted is shown by the following little incident. An Odessa schoolmistress had to report on

whether it was more practical for children to bring food with them from home or to be given a meal at school. At the next meeting she was vigorously rebuked by students for not having properly worked out the general party line on the question, and she was asked whether by omitting to deal with the "Trotskyist platform" on the subject she might not actually have helped to propagate the Trotskyist line.

According to a fiction fundamental to the Soviet Union, the general party line always advances in a perfectly straight line, and in theory deviation is always possible either to the right or to the left. In practice, of course, views which are in harmony with the line at one moment are diametrically opposed to it at the next. In other words the line is a zigzag. The fiction of its straightness is nevertheless rigidly maintained. Appeals to official party documents at a later date are therefore strictly inadmissible. Awkward situations result if careful readers or owners of obsolete editions of Stalin's works recall some of the things he said. This can have the most dangerous consequences. A passage in his *Problems of Leninism*, for instance, refers to Trotsky's special services in the civil war. Trotsky was, of course, later shown to have been a "secret supporter of capitalism and Fascism" even before the Revolution, and to have used his "revolutionary activity merely as a cloak for his counter-revolutionary philosophy".

Each zigzag in the general line therefore naturally leads to retrospective alterations in the "history of the party", which is an important branch of study in all schools, universities and party circles. The purge resulted in there being nobody left to whom the writing of the official history of the party could be entrusted without the danger that the writer, as well as those extolled by him, might not later turn out to have been counter-revolutionaries. In 1938 a highly official party history therefore appeared without the author's name. It was "published by a commission of the Party Central Committee with the personal co-operation of J. Stalin". This version is still current today.

Criticism and self-criticism consist exclusively in the exposure of mistakes and deviations. No defence of oneself or others is permitted, and a political element must be

detected in every alleged failure or error. Every Soviet citizen is expected to carry political responsibility for his own work and that of his subordinates.

When an individual is subjected to the "checking-up" procedure, his superiors, colleagues and subordinates are all obliged to take part, as well as "representatives of the public", *i.e.*, of the party organization, trade unions, etc. At a university, for instance, the latter are for the most part recruited from technical assistants, waitresses, messengers, clerks, etc., with the result that the work of qualified specialists is exposed to the criticism of a body composed for the most part of people of a very much lower educational level. This is represented to the masses as an essential characteristic of Soviet democracy, though the nature of all statements made at such meetings is rigidly prescribed by the competent party authority. These meetings, which often last well into the night, are often far more ritualistic than real.

The practice of "clean-ups" and "check-ups" was originally applied chiefly to the so-called "has-beens", *i.e.*, former landowners, officials, clerics, etc. Towards the end of the twenties it was spreading to include peasants, those who had been involved in discussions within the party, technicians, scientists, artists, politicians and party officials. Finally, in the thirties it included all classes of the population, from the highest party officials down to messenger-boys and stokers.

CHAPTER II

LULL BEFORE THE STORM

"Life is getting better, happier."
(From a speech by Stalin, 1935.)

WITH the gathering of the 1933 harvest the agricultural crisis was overcome, the collective farms started delivering grain and the country began rapidly to recover. Industrialization had its successes too. Consumer goods of Soviet manufacture, household articles of all kinds and the products of the newly established canning industry appeared in the State shops. Money was worth something again. For the first time in years there was something to buy with the bundle of notes in the Soviet citizen's pocket. Simultaneously there was a relaxation of political pressure.

Just as the name of the notorious Cheka had in its time been changed to GPU, so were those ominous initials now changed to the harmless-sounding NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs). Political trials, purges and "check-ups" stopped, and the number of political arrests notably diminished. Young people of so-called non-working-class origin were admitted to universities and to the Red Army, which had hitherto been closed to them, and Stalin made a speech in which he proclaimed that "the son is not responsible for the father". He declared the party's main aim to be "care for the living man", and compared the party to a gardener, lovingly tending the plants in his care. This development reached its climax in the announcement of the new Soviet democratic constitution. A new age seemed to have begun.

A change seemed to take place in Communist customs and principles. Jokes were made about the "cultural New Economic Policy", and old ways of life, previously denounced as bourgeois, were resumed. Bukharin and others described the process as "a slide into capitalism". To some this was welcome, to others embarrassing. Many old

Communists felt the process to be a betrayal of the Revolution.

Remarkable things happened. At the beginning of the thirties a decree wiped out all the school reforms that had been introduced, and all experimentation in education—previously the pride of the Soviet educational system—was strictly forbidden. So thoroughly was the pre-war system of instruction reverted to that the present state of education in the Soviet Union would have been regarded as old-fashioned in progressive educational circles of the nineties.

The youth communities and special homes for homeless children,[1] which had played a big part in Soviet propaganda abroad and had been considered a remarkable Soviet achievement, were, with a few exceptions, abolished, and replaced by what were much more like penal institutions.

Still more surprising was the introduction into the Red Army of officers' ranks—a symbol in the people's eyes of the hated old régime. This was universally regarded as astonishing and incomprehensible. No one could then foresee that the rank of general would also be restored, and that Stalin would be styled "generalissimo". Another development in this direction was the subsequent reintroduction of officers' golden epaulettes, which at the time of the Revolution had been regarded as the supreme symbol of class rule. The reintroduction of cadet schools for the children of senior party officials was another step in the same direction.

In May, 1934, a decree on the teaching of history established the party and the State as the final arbiters of historical truth. Henceforward the State started invading all areas of thought and knowledge. In Lenin's lifetime party and State had exercised a strict political dictatorship, but discussion had been relatively free. It was similar with literature and the arts. Many experiments and new departures had been tried but, with the end of discussion within the party, these phenomena gradually came to an end and the totalitarian claims of the régime began to be felt in every direction. In every sphere—in philosophy, history, literature,

[1] Vividly portrayed in the famous Soviet film of the early thirties, *The Road to Life*.

painting and even music—there was henceforward one style only which was in harmony with the general line. Everything else was deviation, to be denounced and punished.

The one sphere into which the process was not at that time pursued was that of the exact sciences.[1] State and party never seriously involved themselves in physical or mathematical problems. A few attempts were made to stamp the theory of relativity as either bourgeois, reactionary and idealistic on the one hand or as Trotskyist and ultra-left on the other, but these were relatively easily defeated by ingenious theoretical physicists, who were able to prove with truly scholastic dexterity that the theory of relativity was in perfect harmony with dialectical materialism. The relative freedom of the exact sciences applies only in so far as the borderline areas of philosophy are not touched on. But, as though in tribute for their freedom in the matter, the scientists concerned never fail to proclaim the vital importance of dialectical materialism to their particular field of study.

With the decree on the teaching of history the trend towards Russian patriotism and nationalism began. The Soviet Union, from being the "fatherland of the workers of the world", increasingly became the "homeland". Much attention was now paid to native art and folklore. A cult of the past began, and St. Vladimir, Ivan the Terrible, Alexander Nevsky, Dimitri Donskoi, Peter the Great, Suvorov and Kutusov were exalted as national heroes instead of being derided as wicked Tsarists. Rebellious or revolutionary figures such as Stenka Razin and Pugachev retired into oblivion.

Simultaneously the canonization of the great Russian

[1] As appears from the *Comptes Rendus* of the Soviet Academy of Science on questions of genetics (the Lysenko theory) and Press reports of the official party attitude to the quantum theory and certain questions in astrophysics (*The Times*, November 25th, 1948), the reserve which was practised in the thirties towards the results of pure scientific research seems no longer to apply today. But in our opinion this official intervention, apart from the changes in scientific personnel which it involves, has far less serious consequences for Soviet science than is generally supposed. Soviet scientists have developed a special capacity for continuing work which seems to them to be important in spite of frequently changing party doctrine, and for finding justification for it as occasion requires.

writers, particularly Pushkin, began. Russian youth had to forget as quickly as possible that until recently the great Russian authors had been merely "the ideologists of the exploiting class". Soviet films abandoned revolutionary themes and developed a preference for patriotic ones.

Dances such as the foxtrot, tango, etc., which had been forbidden and despised, were suddenly permitted and grew extremely fashionable, and it became one of the "social duties", in the Soviet sense, of a good Communist to take dancing lessons and to go to dances in the knowledge that he was fulfilling a political duty. The story current in the Soviet Union was that this change started when Voroshilov and a number of high officers paid a State visit to Kemal Pasha in Ankara. Voroshilov and his companions were said to have had to learn to dance in forty-eight hours before attending a banquet. Dancing lessons at the public expense were arranged at all factories, offices and other institutions, and the whole country went in for an orgy of dancing.

Shortly before Christmas, in 1936, we think, an article appeared in the Soviet Press suggesting that a Christmas tree—not at Christmas, of course, but at the New Year—would be very nice for the children. Christmas trees had hitherto been strictly taboo. Within a few days, however, a tremendous demand for Christmas trees arose, every self-respecting Communist had his New Year's tree, and it was not long before it was suggested that those who did not have one were left deviationists; for everything which is not taboo in the Soviet Union is encouraged with the whole weight of official propaganda, and non-conformity is regarded with suspicion and may be dangerous.

Jewellery and cosmetics, smart gowns and creased trousers suddenly appeared on the scene. A female member of the Komsomol (the Communist youth organization) with painted lips or plucked eyebrows and polished finger-nails would hitherto have excited general ridicule and condemnation, and would undoubtedly have been expelled from the Komsomol for "moral decadence", but the use of lipstick, etc., was now accepted as a matter of course.

The State simultaneously devoted itself to the strengthening of family ties and the improvement of morals. Divorce

was made more difficult, and a law forbidding abortion—far stricter in its provisions than the corresponding law in most European countries—was put forward for public discussion, and shortly came into force.

The struggle against "petty-bourgeois egalitarianism" began. Since the October Revolution the basis of social justice had been thought to be equality, but equality was now derided as a petty-bourgeois prejudice. Members of the party had been forbidden to accept more than a very modest maximum salary, corresponding roughly with the pay of a skilled worker. The Communist Party had consequently acquired something of the character of a religious order. But this regulation had recently been modified by exemption from inclusion in the maximum of any income derived from literary fees or royalties. This, of course, included payments made for the writing of the widely circulated party literature.

All limitations on the incomes of party members were now abolished. The preferential position of party officials grew more and more apparent, and its full extent was by no means expressed by the difference between their pay and that of an ordinary worker. Wages and salaries grew more and more and more unequal. The higher rates of pay were increased from three to fourfold and the lower by perhaps from 20 to 50 per cent, while the cost of living rose after the abolition of rationing. Most important of all, higher officials and leading technicians were given incomparably better living accommodation, large sums of money were put at their disposal, and they were allowed substantial expenses on their frequent official journeys, and holidays at the public expense in sumptuous sanatoria. Cars, which could be freely used for private purposes, were put at the disposal of those of sufficient importance in administration and industry.

During the NEP period, having money, property or a high income, so far from representing social respectability, had represented the very reverse, but a *volte-face* now took place on a quite inconceivable scale. The size of one's income became the direct measure of one's importance and social position. The driving force in the Soviet Union became the

struggle for better positions, higher incomes and more favourable living conditions.

The general transition from fixed wages to piece rates and the awarding of production bonuses enhanced the tendencies to inequality among the workers and peasants. "Shock-work", Stakhanovism,[1] dedication to self-appointed tasks, the primary appeal of which had previously been to the Socialist enthusiasm of the masses, were now associated with the direct material advantage of those who undertook them. When permission was given for each peasant to cultivate for himself an area not exceeding one hectare, to own a cow, a few pigs and a number of chickens, the situation of the kolkhoz[2] peasants was also definitely improved.

"Life is getting better, happier."

[1] A worker's rationalization of his labour to increase his output.
[2] Collective farm.

CHAPTER III

THE IRON COMMISSAR

THE general quiescence which set in after the first Five-Year Plan turned out to be merely the lull before the storm. It was broken as though by a thunderclap by the murder of S. M. Kirov, secretary of the Leningrad party committee and a member of the Politburo. This occurred on December 1st, 1934. The reasons for the murder are still obscure today. The most varied hypotheses circulated both inside and outside the Soviet Union. The official party version was that it was the work of a small group of opposition plotters. It was certainly an echo of the internal party strife which had begun in Lenin's lifetime, had increased after his death and even after Stalin's victory had never entirely subsided.

This party strife reached its climax with Trotsky's defeat in 1927. After the fall of the Trotskyists the struggle between factions did not stop, though it took other forms. With the increasing obstacles to free party discussion the factions adopted secret and underground methods. Controversy centred in three questions: (1) whether the path to the world-wide triumph of Communism lay *via* the theory of "permanent revolution" or that of "Socialism in one country", the latter combined with rearmament and power politics; (2) the question of internal party democracy; and (3) the tempo of "Socialist construction", industrialization and collectivization.

These internal party dissensions were not limited to party circles, but rent the whole country. Though all public discussion of party questions had long since ceased, and on the surface the position and policy of the Stalin régime seemed to be completely secure, the assassination was a sign for the masses that the struggle, though it had adopted other forms, had not yet ended. That is why the murder of Kirov shook the country to its foundations.

The note struck at Kirov's funeral and at the demonstrations that followed was significant. For the first time an appeal was made to "class vigilance", "class vengeance", and "mercilessness" towards "enemies of the people". Speeches and proclamations were filled with hate and vengeance. These emotions, unlike those of 1917 and the years of the civil war, were for the most part artificial and synthetic; they were officially inspired and ordered from above. But that did not lessen the undertone of terror behind the words. Terror is no less effective when it is organized than when it is spontaneous.

Large numbers of party officials, loyal to party discipline and without personally approving of the policy, had helped to carry out the Government's extreme collectivization measures, with all their excesses. The mistakes made and the injustices done weighed heavily on their conscience, and they were full of relief that the difficult years were over and that the country had overcome the crisis. As the Government that had caused the crisis had succeeded in overcoming it, they wanted to forget the past, and hoped that the people would forget it too. But the Kirov murder seemed to show that the people had not forgotten. These officials, with their guilty conscience, now felt irrevocably bound to the Stalin régime. For better or for worse, their future path was mapped out. It was the path which led ultimately to their self-accusations and confessions in the prisons of the NKVD or at the public "show" trials.

A new political turn was in preparation. It did not occur at once. The course had to be changed gradually. Whether the Kirov murder was the cause or the symptom, it was the turning-point.

The measures which immediately followed the murder did not at first affect a very large number of people. There was no feeling of any check in the general economic and political recovery which followed the end of the collectivization process. But the murder of Kirov was followed by the famous law of December, 1934, which provided for the summary infliction of death sentences by virtue of article 58 (viii) (terror). The same law proclaimed the duty of denouncing one's close relatives and—an innovation in

modern legal history—provided for the taking of drastic measures against an accused's relatives, even if they were entirely unconnected with the case.

A few months after the murder a new political clean-up started. It began quietly and without the usual publicity, and was modestly called "checking party personal papers" or "regularization of party affairs". It ended, however, by outdoing all previous operations of the kind. The appeal to "class vigilance" led to an enormous flood of denunciations and "unmaskings". The credit of party members and of ordinary Soviet citizens depended on the number of people they denounced. No evidence was required. "Where class instinct speaks, proof is unnecessary," said Comrade Kaminsky, a scientist of the Kiev Academy of Sciences, when somebody at an official meeting asked what proof there was to support an accusation of counter-revolutionary activity levelled at Professor Kopershinsky. Incidentally both Kopershinsky and Kaminsky were later arrested.

Byelusov, the secretary of the Kiev Academy, was publicly accused in the Kiev Press of a lack of "class vigilance" because he demanded proof from the author of a similar denunciation. Particularly zealous "activists" even tried to establish a "norm" for the number of denunciations required of an individual to establish his vigilance. The number was about a hundred. Nothing more concrete was required than vague and stereotyped accusations such as of "having an anti-Soviet attitude", "supporting hostile elements", "collaborating with the enemy", "having relations with the enemy", "loss of class vigilance", "moral decadence", "distorting the party line", "deviationism in general", etc., etc. No attempt to defend oneself was possible, and in any case would have done more harm than good. It was wiser and more prudent to appear in a white sheet and proclaim one's penitence, even when there was nothing to be penitent about. In any case the outcome depended less on the result of one's "check-up" than on the secret decision of the NKVD or other party authorities.

All this encouragement of denunciation obviously led to every possible kind of abuse. Denunciations were motivated by personal vengeance and the ambition of junior

officials to oust their seniors and secure the advantages that went with their posts. An important factor was that every arrest of a leading official, or even his dismissal, meant that a flat in a newly-built block fell vacant. Factories, offices and institutions frequently have whole blocks of flats at their disposal, and the acquisition of one of these flats is the supreme ambition of every Soviet citizen. In the next few years whole blocks of flats in Moscow and other big cities completely changed their tenants several times over.

The zeal with which young people and subordinates strove to "unmask" and accuse their seniors was particularly noteworthy. Students "unmasked" their professors, humble party members denounced those in official positions, junior officials accused those above them. This general revolt of the subordinate, particularly inside the party, provided an outlet for the ambitious and a quick and easy road to promotion. This was one of the deepest roots of the events of the Yezhov period.

Denunciations, whether made in writing or proclaimed aloud at meetings or printed in newspapers or in the wall-newspapers at the factories, had important consequences for their victims. In many cases, however, there was no specific connection between a public denunciation and a subsequent arrest by the NKVD. Sometimes a violent Press campaign was not followed by an arrest. The distinguished mathematician Lusin, for instance, was the victim of such a campaign in Moscow, but, so far as we know, was never arrested. If one was denounced one's best chance of escaping arrest was to change one's place of work or, better still, to move to another town. Speaking generally, however, there was undoubtedly a connection between public accusations and the subsequent intervention of the NKVD.

The normal first consequence of a denunciation was the loss of one's job. A whole army of unemployed so-called "leftists", "rightists", "nationalists", "Trotskyists" and "decadents" now appeared, engaged in a hopeless pilgrimage from office to office, seeking to appeal and to obtain justice, *i.e.*, to rehabilitate themselves and get back their jobs. Most of them were qualified, or fairly well qualified,

people. But nearly all their former friends now turned their backs on them, and could not or would not help them. For to speak up on behalf of any such person was in itself a highly incriminating circumstance. Most of these people ended up by being arrested, and in many cases arrest came as a deliverance. Some actually went to the NKVD and begged to be arrested, because the political stigma and the impossibility of getting a job made life outside intolerable.

But in spite of the fear of reprisals, in spite of all the danger involved, there were some who were willing to help these unfortunates. Their position, and that of the wives and children of arrested men, was very like that of the Jews in Germany during the first years of the Hitler régime. The picture of the situation would be incomplete if one failed to remember those, sometimes in high positions, who tried persistently but, of course, surreptitiously, to help the victims of the clean-up by trying indirectly to find work for former colleagues, looking after their families, etc.

Meanwhile the clean-up developed into a purge which gradually involved every section of the population.

In the summer of 1936 a new series of great "show" trials began. In these Vyshinsky, the Public Prosecutor, a former Menshevik, proclaimed for the first time that the party opposition, above all Trotsky and Bukharin, had not just developed into counter-revolutionaries in the course of their careers, but had always been in contact with foreign capitalists and Fascists, with a view to preventing the Russian revolution or, if it were successful, overthrowing it.

Yagoda, the feared Commissar for Home Affairs, was replaced by Yezhov. For a moment the country sighed with relief, believing there would be a change of policy. But it soon became clear that the only change in policy was an increase in its severity. Yezhov was extolled in the Press as the "Iron Commissar", who had succeeded at the last moment in unmasking a frightful plot, reaching into the highest places in the land. Though Yezhov gave his name to this important episode in Soviet history, as little is known about his origins and his previous career as is known about his end. He appeared like a meteor in the Soviet political firmament and vanished as suddenly as he came.

In 1939 he was removed from his post and became for a short time People's Commissar for Internal Waterway Transport. He then vanished from the political stage for ever. One thing that is certain is that during his period of office he enjoyed a high degree of Stalin's confidence.

The arrests of this period were distinguished from those of the past by the fact that they affected people prominent in the public eye. Those who fell to the axe were not just "relics of the past", as the various groups of "has-beens" and "kulaks" were often called, but managers, secretaries of party cells, secretaries of regional and district committees, chiefs of industrial trusts and their departmental heads, high officials in the People's Commissariats, particularly the transport organization, Red Army officers up to and including Marshals of the Soviet Union, high-ups in the party hierarchy, including members of the Central Committee and the Politburo, celebrated writers, scholars and technicians.

When prominent people were arrested, generally no announcement was at first made, and the Soviet public got into the habit of carefully noting which of the numerous pictures of celebrities disappeared from the walls or were withdrawn from the shops, and what political pamphlets and books were no longer on sale or available in the libraries. Such disappearances were certain indications of arrest. The purge worked havoc among schoolbooks. The new policy of the cult of individual personality had resulted in their being full of pictures of marshals, people's commissars and other high dignitaries, with little articles in their praise. The result was that whole editions now had to be pulped without ever being distributed. The purge developed at such a rate that the new heroes who replaced the old had also become "enemies of the people" by the time a new book appeared. The result was that for years children had to copy out all their lessons, because no schoolbooks were available. The more valuable banknotes in circulation bore the signatures of five high officials, all of whom were eventually arrested. In 1938 new rouble notes were issued with no signature at all.

The works of those arrested vanished with their names.

When a noted sculptor, Professor Kratko, was arrested, all his carvings disappeared from public places and exhibitions, though most of them served to glorify the Soviet régime. The number of original exhibits at the Museum of the Revolution in Moscow grew smaller and smaller. They were replaced by pictures emphasizing Stalin's part in the Revolution and his alleged close contact with Lenin in its leadership.

The arrest of a writer or artist automatically caused his work to be regarded as harmful, and it invariably disappeared, but the same thing did not happen in the case of technical or scientific work. It was merely transferred to somebody else and carried on under his name. When A. N. Tupolev, the famous aircraft designer, was arrested, for instance, a number of aircraft types named ANT, after his initials, were simply called something else. One of our cell-mates had, with four collaborators, completed some work in physics shortly before his arrest and had lectured on it at a conference of the physics group of the Academy of Sciences. His account appeared word for word in two scientific journals in Russian and English, but under the names of the only two collaborators who had not been arrested.

"Enemies of the people" were even discovered among the characters in novels. During the Yezhov period the third volume of Panferov's *Brusski*, a well-known novel about collective farms, appeared, describing the Yezhov period and giving an interesting picture of the official version of the struggle against the "enemies of the people". The very improbable "disclosures" and confessions that it contained gave a perfectly accurate picture of the equally improbable conditions of the time. Characters described as noble Soviet citizens in the second volume turned out in the third volume to have been secret enemies of the people. When a revised edition of the second volume appeared, the characters due for subsequent "unmasking" had been slightly re-drawn by a few bold strokes of the author's pen, with the result that their deceit and cunning could now be foreseen.

The chief accusation against the enemies of the people

was not the general one of counter-revolutionary activity and sabotage, as it had normally been in the past. The normal charge now was of espionage on behalf of capitalist States.

The signal for this was Stalin's big speech in the spring of 1937, in which he called for increased "vigilance" and said that the capitalist States were employing hundreds of thousands of spies and saboteurs to deprive the Soviet Union of the fruits of Socialist construction and to prepare a military attack on it. One spy could do more damage than a whole hostile army.

During this phase of Soviet development the exaltation of Stalin as a personality began. Since the defeat of the opposition there had never been any doubt about his position, but hitherto the fiction of the modest "general secretary", avoiding the limelight and merely carrying out the party's collective will, had been maintained.

Stalin's name now came more and more into prominence in the Press, in propaganda and public announcements. Busts and portraits of him now became obligatory, not only in all factories and public offices, but in the home of every Soviet citizen who wished to show that he was not disloyal.

Official descriptions which were applied to him acquired a ritualistic significance. Examples are "our great wise Leader", "the Leader of the workers of the whole world", "Lenin's true pupil and successor", "the wise Leader of the peoples". When his name was mentioned at public meetings it became customary for those present to rise from their seats and applaud. Every word from his mouth acquired a sacred significance and was repeatedly quoted. There was scarcely anything on which it was possible to write a book or an article without mentioning the special interest, and, indeed, the leading rôle, taken in the subject by Stalin. There is, however, no *Führerprinzip*, no leadership principle, in the Soviet Union. Stalin's commanding rôle is attributed to his outstanding personality, and the fiction of Soviet democracy and the collective power of the party is rigidly preserved.

It is curious to note that the period during which

Stalin was being increasingly exalted as the great and wise leader, and the concentration of power in his hands was becoming more and more conspicuous, coincided with a trend that culminated in the adoption of the outer forms of democracy. The so-called Stalin constitution, however, broke with the original fundamental tenets of the Soviet State. For example, Lenin's principle that every worker working in the Soviet Union should count as a Soviet citizen was done away with, and the principle of territorial citizenship, as practised by the bourgeois nations, was reintroduced. The principle of the division of power between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary had been criticized as bourgeois and discarded by the original Soviet ideologists, but it was now recognized and solemnly reintroduced. The direct election by secret ballot of all law-making bodies was also reintroduced, so that these bodies can only nominally be regarded as soviets, having lost the original character of the soviets promoted by Lenin.

Though the constitution does not specifically exclude a multiplicity of candidates, there is in practice only a single official list.

The word "democracy" itself had been discredited as being identified with outworn bourgeois ideology, but democracy, in the specific form of Soviet democracy, was now officially declared to be the fundamental principle of the Soviet constitution.

The reasons for this were twofold. In the first place it was desirable to establish in the eyes of foreign countries a clear dividing-line between the Soviet Union and the Fascist dictatorships. But this is far from being a sufficient explanation for the emphasis that is still laid on Soviet democracy. The reason for this, in our opinion, is the strength of the demand in the country for democracy—real democracy, that is to say, and not a sham. The country is tired of dictatorship and, the more brutally conspicuous becomes the all-embracing power of the State, the stronger grows the desire of the masses to exercise real democratic control. The people feel themselves ripe for democracy, and so strong is this feeling that the Government is forced to do something to meet it. If it does not give the people the

substance of democracy, at least it feels forced to give them the shadow.

An interesting example was provided at that time of how far the Government could go in genuinely sounding public opinion without endangering its own position. The subject chosen for the experiment was characteristically a non-political one, lying outside the main stream of critical questions of the day. It was the draft of the law which was subsequently imposed draconically forbidding abortion, which had hitherto been permitted in cases not involving danger and if carried out under official auspices. After the publication of the draft, meetings were held everywhere, in factories, offices, collective farms, etc., and considerable freedom of expression was allowed, though the party had already declared itself unequivocally in favour of the proposed law. Newspapers printed letters from the public, both for and against. The great majority of letters sent in were opposed to abortion being made illegal, or at any rate to the harsh manner in which the Government proposed to put the principle into practice, but the majority of those the newspapers printed were naturally in favour of the Government. Yet the discussions at public meetings and the resolutions which were passed at them showed clearly that a great majority of the people, especially women, were opposed to the draft law, *i.e.*, directly opposed to the decision of the party Central Committee. It was enacted all the same. But the incident showed that, if the people were allowed an inch of democracy, they would take a mile. We believe that this experiment persuaded the Government more relentlessly to tighten the reins of the dictatorship and to make sure that the veneer of democracy given to the new constitution should be completely fictitious. But, as this course was bound to lead to traces of opposition in the party and the Government apparatus, it also persuaded them still further to stimulate the purge.

The simultaneous tightening-up of the dictatorship and adoption of fictitious democratic methods led to some remarkable results. All voting, even in the smallest units, such as factory committees and party cells, was now secret, but the results had to be virtually unanimous and represent

the leaders' wishes. There were all manner of ways in which a man who dared to vote the other way risked being found out by the NKVD or some other supervisory body and compelled to atone for his "hostile" attitude. One way of finding him out might be from indiscreet private remarks. To add verisimilitude to the democratic process, arrangements were sometimes made to secure a small hostile vote by giving a few people the necessary instructions beforehand.

Steps were taken to ensure that no individual or group, however insignificant, should ever show any trace of initiative, however much in harmony it might be with the party line, without first obtaining official approval, from the secretary of the party cell, for example. All forms of collective representation were strictly prohibited and counted as "un-Soviet behaviour", unless initiated by the party. The most notable characteristic of Soviet democracy, the virtues of which are so much vaunted abroad, is the complete monopolization of initiative by authority.

The elections to the Supreme Soviet coincided with the climax of the purge. By the time the elected assembly met a large proportion of the candidates on the party's published lists had been arrested. Some had been arrested even before the voting took place. The more apparent the fictitious nature of the new democracy became, the less interest the masses took in it. Elections, with their single lists of candidates, degenerated into mere political demonstrations.

The number of arrests rose steadily in 1937 and until about the end of 1938. In some establishments the numbers of arrests exceeded 100 per cent. This was because the original occupant of a post was often followed into prison by his successor. The process was light-heartedly referred to as the "shift" system. It was not infrequent for three managers of a concern to be arrested in rapid succession. Of the thirteen secretaries of the Kiev Academy of Sciences who succeeded each other between 1931 and 1938 all without exception were arrested. Of the seven principals of the university six were arrested and one died a natural death.

By far the commonest charge against those arrested in the towns, and particularly among the intelligentzia, was

espionage. This was made clear at the *prorabotka* meetings—workers' meetings at which attendance was compulsory. The procedure at these differed somewhat from that at the "checking-up" process we have described. At a *prorabotka* the speakers thanked the NKVD for the promptness and vigilance with which it had succeeded in rendering dangerous spies and saboteurs innocuous and demanded severe punishment for them. Episodes in the private or working lives of those arrested had to be described in such a way as to make them appear to be "enemies of the people". It was also necessary to incriminate and accuse as many as possible of their still unarrested associates. This practice revolted even the most loyal Soviet citizens. Every leading worker was required to speak at these meetings, and any statement which seemed to cast doubt on the guilt of an arrested man was regarded as suspicious.

In spite of all this, the accusations were not generally believed. But most loyal Soviet citizens believed that something must lie behind the arrests, if only an incautious though by no means really wicked remark, or a previous connection or acquaintance with someone who had been really guilty. The average Russian knew as little as was known abroad about the true mechanics of the arrests and confessions, which we shall discuss in later chapters. Even the confessions at the great "show" trials were as little believed in the Soviet Union as they were abroad, or even less. The average Soviet citizen found them as puzzling as did the non-Soviet world.

Eventually a situation was reached in which there was practically no-one in the Soviet Union who did not have at least one relative or close friend in prison.

In the economic field this period was characterized by intensified rearmament and preparation for war. More and more labour and raw materials were withdrawn from civilian production and directed into military production. Locomotive and tractor factories were converted to the production of tanks and other war material. The building of houses ceased altogether, and the available cement flowed towards the frontier for the construction of defence works, later to be known as the Stalin Line. A large part of the

harvest went to the army's reserve supplies. Food began to get scarce again.

Meanwhile the consequences of the purge gradually became apparent, and began to affect the country's economic life and its military strength. Those in charge of practically every factory and every railway station, every school or learned institution in the country had been removed. The same applied to innumerable collective farms, nearly all Government offices and the whole of the military apparatus. In nearly every key position in the country there had been several "shifts" of inexperienced successors. The quality of work deteriorated notably. Continual meetings of workers and the fear of imminent arrest paralysed initiative and work discipline, and draconic measures were necessary to keep things going. From that time to the present day the penalty for one day's unjustified absence from work in the Soviet Union has been a year's imprisonment. Being more than a quarter-of-an-hour late three times means dismissal, or at best being put into a lower grade.

The weakening of the country threatened to lead to catastrophe—the political suicide of a great nation. The growing threat of military aggression by Hitler and Mussolini coincided with the climax of the Yezhov purge. But the Soviet Union had been so weakened by it that she was in no position to throw her weight into the balance to prevent aggression, even if she had wanted to. The trend of Soviet foreign policy in the thirties removed her from the camp of the anti-Fascist western European democracies into a position of benevolent neutrality towards the Fascist dictatorships, and ultimately into alliance with them.

This trend was in entire harmony with the Stalin line. The Soviet renunciation of the strategy of revolution in the capitalist countries and its setting out on the path of imperialist and military expansion, presupposed the weakening of the capitalist world and the inevitability of a second world war. Fascist aggression was welcome, so long as it was not directed against the Soviet Union, and the hope of Soviet foreign policy necessarily lay in provoking war between the Axis Powers and the west European democracies, and

between America and Japan. Such a policy was bound to meet with opposition in the ranks of the Communist Party, not only abroad but in the Soviet Union, and this was certainly one of the reasons why the purge extended to the Comintern, which had for all practical purposes sunk to complete insignificance long before its eventual liquidation.

But, whether or not foreign policy was based on these factors, the condition to which the country was reduced by the purge, the approaching wave of economic distress, the weakness of the Red Army, which was robbed of practically all its officers down to the rank of major, and finally the enormously increased discontent of the masses caused by the purge itself, left the Government with little choice in 1938, and still less in 1939, but to permit the Fascist attacks on Austria, Czechoslovakia and finally Poland, and to make the diversion of German aggression from Russia the main aim of its foreign policy. That was the real reason for Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler, which we regard as one of the basic roots of the second world war.

Stalin's pact with Hitler is frequently represented as a disgraceful betrayal by Stalin of the aims of world Communism on the one hand, or on the other as a brilliant tactical manœuvre, a Machiavellian master-stroke intended to gain time and weaken the enemy. We prefer to believe that Stalin meant the pact perfectly seriously. If Hitler had not broken it, he would have adhered to it strictly until Germany had been enfeebled by an allied victory. Stalin in fact never actively intervened on his own initiative except when an issue was already settled, *e.g.*, the fate of Poland and Japan.

Russia's military weakness in the war against Finland has been often represented as a superb piece of bluff, a masterpiece of deception, as was proved by the stubborn Russian defence against the subsequent German assault. We, however, prefer to believe that the Russian weakness in the Finnish campaign was completely genuine. The same weakness was apparent in the early stages of Hitler's invasion. In our opinion the real powers of resistance of the Russian people were only called forth by Hitler's attack. The Stalin régime, unpopular though it was, was the only

rallying point for defence, and all the energies of the people concentrated round it. Large sections of the people, particularly the peasants, at first regarded the German army as liberators, not because of any sympathy with Nazism, but because the pressure of Soviet life was so intolerable that it seemed that any change could be only for the better. Similar feelings led a large proportion of the Soviet intelligentzia and working-classes to remain in the occupied towns. Hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers threw away their arms and surrendered. It was only the inhuman German treatment of Russian prisoners of war, the mass extermination of the Jews, the policy of conquest stressed by the German command, the herding together of whole armies of slaves, the deliberate affronts to personal and national dignity, such as the compulsory wearing of badges, and the use of whipping as a punishment, which to Russians is an inconceivable insult, which caused a flare-up of patriotism and led to the growth of a powerful resistance movement behind the German lines. This, in conjunction with the powerful aid of the western allies, resulted in a tremendous will to resistance against which the German attack was bound to fail.

To return, however, to the Yezhov purge. Every such movement has its natural limits. Towards the end of 1938 a point had been reached at which denunciations and incriminating statements had been accumulated affecting practically every man and woman in the Soviet Union. The wave had passed its peak. The threat of war with Japan brought one last upward surge, leading to numerous arrests and particularly heavy sentences. But after that the flood quickly subsided. Arrests grew fewer and fewer, and the incubus of fear that lay over the people gradually grew less. The Government must have realized that further progress down the same path would lead to complete catastrophe. At the beginning of 1939 Yezhov disappeared from the political scene as abruptly as he came. He was succeeded by Beria, one of Stalin's closest colleagues and, like him, a Georgian. The people were convinced that a new era had begun. Prisoners were released in thousands, and many were restored to their old positions, or even promoted. The

percentage of those released is difficult to estimate. Among the educated class of prisoner, about which we are most competent to form an opinion, it may have been from ten to fifty per cent, including the majority of those who had not yet been sentenced.

For the first time there was talk in the Press of abuses in NKVD interrogation methods. These were attributed to saboteurs, deliberate counter-revolutionaries and Fascist elements inside the NKVD organization. The result was that public trials of examining magistrates were held in many places, at which witnesses described the various forms of compulsion employed to extract sham confessions. Some of those who had so freely made the public denunciations and accusations so vigorously demanded of them by the authorities were also tried.

The change in control of the NKVD and the renewal of its personnel involved only a mitigation of the system and no fundamental alteration in its structure or in the part played by the NKVD. Many of those released and restored to their positions, particularly in party circles, were arrested again when war broke out and disappeared for ever, though their examining magistrates had been arrested in the meantime. We shall give an example later.

CHAPTER IV

INTERROGATION

THOSE arrested were completely isolated from the outside world, and everything connected with the NKVD was shrouded in darkness and mystery. Those who regained their freedom did not speak about their prison experiences, even to their closest friends, for the NKVD warned them not to. But by the beginning of the Yezhov period rumours had begun to seep through to the population that the confessions quoted at the *prorabotka* meetings and heard at the "show" trials were extorted by maltreatment, beatings and threats. Whole blocks of houses around the NKVD buildings and prisons were cleared of foreigners and others from whom there were special reasons for concealing what was going on. For night after night prisoners' screams could be heard coming from the interrogation cells.

All political arrests were made under a regulation warrant signed by a State attorney. They were usually carried out at night at home. Cases were not infrequent, however, of people being arrested at work, in the street, etc., or being summoned to make depositions in the NKVD building and then never returning. The indictment was usually based on article 58 of the Russian penal code or on the corresponding article of the code of some other Soviet republic. This, the only political article in the statute book, consists of about fourteen paragraphs of which we need only mention here paragraph (i) (high treason); (iii) (armed revolt); (vi) (espionage); (vii) (sabotage); (viii) (terror); (x) (counter-revolutionary propaganda); (xi) (association with a counter-revolutionary organization.)

The arrest was followed, after a period of anything from a few days to a year, by the first interrogation. According to regulations this should take place at the latest within ten days. Each prisoner was carefully isolated from fellow-prisoners who knew him. Consultation with defence counsel was unheard of, and in the overwhelming majority of cases

no defence of any kind was permitted. When counsel for the defence was permitted, his rôle was purely formal. The judiciary played no noticeable part either in the arrest or the fate of the accused. Lists of those to be arrested, or warrants for their arrest, were laid for signature before a State attorney, who would be acquainted neither with the reason for the arrest nor with the nature of the charge. We know this from the accounts of several State attorneys who were themselves later arrested and shared our cell.

It was said that in the past arrested foreigners had in some cases been granted interviews with a representative of their embassy in the presence of an NKVD official, if they desired such an interview or the embassy asked for it; we have no knowledge of any such case. However, the majority of foreign nationals arrested during the Yezhov period were either Germans or Poles, for the most part political *émigrés* and the like, whose politics prevented their appealing to their embassies. The charge was strictly secret and, if the case ever came to trial, was only presented to the prisoner for cursory examination in the interrogation cell a few days before it began. If interrogation led to a quick confession, it would last for only a few days. Otherwise it would last for weeks or months, often, with interruptions, for as much as a year. A rule, to which there were practically no exceptions, was that no interrogation could be concluded except with a confession from the accused. The extraction of a confession was thus its essential purpose.

In a relatively small percentage of cases the arrest was based on some actual occurrence, such as a factory or railway accident, the destruction of goods in store or in transit, or even only an incautious remark or expression of opinion. Typical of this kind of case was that of a young peasant who, after a drunken party at a collective farm, picked up an axe and threw it at another peasant, of whom he was jealous; as luck would have it, the axe missed its mark and hit a portrait of Stalin, whereupon the man was arrested, accused of terrorism and condemned to eight years' forced labour. In such cases the interrogation was directed to extracting a confession attributing the occurrence to deliberate political intention.

The great majority of cases, however, had no such basis in fact. In every case, of course, the NKVD had at its disposal innumerable reports of unwise expressions of opinion, among which there were bound to be some that could be represented as coming within a sufficiently broad interpretation of the terms "espionage" or "counter-revolutionary agitation". If, however, the accused wished to make such things the subject of his confession, the examining magistrate would reply that he knew all about them already and attached not the slightest importance to them; everybody said that sort of thing, and such confessions were "not accepted".

In by far the largest number of cases the reason for the arrest was some so-called "objective characteristic". An "objective characteristic" could be a man's social extraction, the past or present nature of his work, his being related to or friendly with someone, often simply his membership of or activity in some official Soviet organization, his nationality or some connection with a foreign country. A man's "objective characteristic" was immediately recognizable by his cell-mates on his first appearance in a cell, but was never admitted by the examining magistrate to be the real reason for his arrest.

The method of interrogation, proudly referred to by officials of the NKVD as the Yezhov method, consisted of making it the arrested man's primary task to build up the whole case against himself, more or less of his own free will. Every arrested man had not only to invent his own "legend" but at the same time to do his utmost to make it plausible in every detail, relating it to actual events or giving these the desired twist.

The grotesque result of this was that the accused strained every nerve to convince their examining magistrates that their invented "legends" were true and represented the most serious political crimes possible, so that they should not be rejected as too improbable or insignificant. If they were rejected, it only meant a continuation of the interrogation until the "legend" was altered or replaced by a new one involving a sufficiently serious political crime. What was demanded of the individual depended less on his

confession than on his personality, social position, education, party membership, etc. Most peasants and unskilled workers, for example, escaped with a simple confession that, for purposes of counter-revolutionary agitation, they had alleged that there was a shortage of certain foods or of petrol, or that shoes manufactured in Soviet factories were of inferior quality, or something of the kind. This was sufficient for a sentence of from three to seven years' forced labour under article 58 (x) (counter-revolutionary agitation).

These "legends" were occasionally distinguished by a high degree of creative imagination. A Kiev workman, for instance, described in detail how he had tried to blow up a kilometre-long bridge over the Dnieper with several kilograms of arsenic, but, because of rainy weather, had had to abandon the attempt. A worker in an educational supplies factory, in which blackboards, globes, etc., were manufactured, maintained that he belonged to an organization whose object was the construction of artificial volcanoes to blow the entire Soviet Union sky-high. There were also some most remarkable cases of espionage. A Greek doctor, writing to relatives in Salonika, had revealed to the Greek Government the names and characteristics of certain small fish which were being bred with a view to the extermination of malarial mosquitoes in Russia. Another accused had copied and communicated to the Polish consul the weather forecast regularly posted up in a public park. Professor Byelin, of Kiev University, explained in the course of self-criticism at a public meeting that he had inadvertently mentioned in a text-book the depth of the Dnieper at various places, whereupon he was arrested as a spy and confessed that the motive for his action had been espionage, *i.e.*, to help the German army in case of war. Another professor, a Jewish refugee from Germany, had, while travelling abroad, given German agents details about the navigability of the River Ob by armoured cruisers; a third had indirectly forwarded to the Japanese consul reports about the political attitude of Jewish children.

But, with the best will in the world, the imagination of the accused was in many cases not up to devising a suitable "legend". Sometimes the examining magistrate helped, and

cell-mates were nearly always consulted, whereupon the whole cell would get together to produce an adequate confession. There were real artists and specialists in this line, who were often moved from cell to cell by the magistrate for the purpose. Some were men who had completely lost all self-respect and were prepared to give advice for a small reward in the form of food or cigarettes. We also met others who responded to prisoners' requests out of sheer pity, and helped them to compose their "legends" and phrase them properly, incriminating as few others as possible. "As much fiction and as few facts as possible" was the advice such a friend gave to one of us when devising his "legend"; and to this day he has never ceased to be grateful to him.

Everyone was required to denounce at least one other person who had "recruited" him, *i.e.*, had persuaded him to engage in his counter-revolutionary activity and had thereafter directed it; everyone was also required to denounce as many other people as possible whom he had himself "recruited" and induced to commit political crimes, or who had worked with him in the same counter-revolutionary organization. Again and again during the hour and often day-long interrogations the prisoner was asked: "Who recruited you?" and "Whom did you recruit?"

Answering these questions necessarily incriminated others, and to the conscientious this presented a terrible moral problem. The best way out was to name people who were dead or had left the Soviet Union for ever. An Armenian priest we came across had an excellent memory and was able to confess to having "recruited" every single Armenian he had buried during the past three years. Frequently the cell into which one was put had a list available of dead people whose names could be drawn on for the purpose. The occupants of the cell changed rapidly, and the list of names was passed from mouth to mouth; knowledge of it saved many. The denunciation of people who were known to have been arrested and sentenced was regarded as a disagreeable necessity, but was not discreditable. The examining magistrate often helped by

showing the accused the written statements of other prisoners, which he then had only to confirm. Sometimes confrontations between prisoners were arranged at which an arrested acquaintance told you to your face, in the presence of the examining magistrate, either that you had persuaded him or that he had persuaded you to commit some serious political crime in the course of a conversation which had in fact been completely innocent. According to the otherwise fairly strict code of honour of the cells, this was not regarded as particularly discreditable.

There were some who had no inhibitions whatever about incriminating others. They denounced hundreds of people, in some cases regarding it as a form of sport, or hoping thereby to reduce the whole interrogation system to a farce. One divisional commander, for instance, declared that he had "recruited" every officer in his division down to and including the company commanders.

But even without such exaggerations the number of those who were thus added to the NKVD lists of counter-revolutionaries inevitably grew like an avalanche. The lists ended by including practically the entire adult population of the Soviet Union. This point must have been reached about the middle of 1938. By that time the system had reduced itself to absurdity as a basis for further arrests. But the collection of "evidence" incriminating nearly every inhabitant of the Soviet Union, and in particular everyone in an important position, was not just an arithmetical consequence of the methods employed; it was also a deliberate NKVD policy, providing it with a pretext for the arrest of any Soviet citizen at any time.

The NKVD has a dossier for every important official, stamping him as a counter-revolutionary, spy and traitor. In our own experience we know of cases, even after the appointment of Beria as People's Commissar for Internal Affairs and the concomitant changes in the leading personnel of the NKVD, in which statements were explicitly demanded from and made by prisoners charging leading scientists and men of learning with being foreign spies at the very time when they were being awarded the Stalin Prize and other high honours. So far they have never been

arrested. One of them may be mentioned here, as he has since died. At the time of his death he was president of the Ukrainian Academy of Science; he was the celebrated physiologist, Professor Bogomolets, whose researches into the prolongation of life have been frequently reported in the non-Soviet Press. At least ten statements were obtained from arrested scientists denouncing him as a Fascist and a spy.

To secure the confessions and incriminating statements required, a detailed technique was developed by the NKVD. It was applied according to the individual peculiarities of the accused, depending on his political importance and what he was accused of. Methods were based on central instructions and not left to the inventive powers of individual officers. This was borne out by the fact that, apart from unimportant local variations, they were simultaneously employed throughout the Soviet Union, from Kiev to Vladivostok and Leningrad to Tiflis. When alterations were introduced they were felt simultaneously everywhere. Shortly after Beria's appointment, for instance, beatings were not completely given up, it is true, but their incidence was reduced to comparatively few cases.

The first stage was the so-called "persuasion" stage. The examining magistrate tried to persuade the prisoner to make a voluntary admission of guilt, generally by promising him complete freedom from punishment, or at least to let him off very lightly. The magistrate's efforts at persuasion were shrewdly conducted and were based on knowledge of human nature and of the specific mentality of the Soviet individual; and they were specially adapted to the character of the accused. In many cases this phase was sufficient to make the accused give in. Certain types of intellectual submitted very easily to persuasion, above all because this phase generally lasted for a very long time. Besides persuasion, intimidation and threats played a considerable rôle; they were generally employed after the persuasion phase was over. The prisoner was threatened with the serious consequences of obstinacy and resistance, and the prospect of severe penalties, even of being shot, was held out.

Indirect methods were often applied. During an interrogation in which the magistrate was trying to extract a confession by "peaceful" means, for instance, inhuman female screams and shrieks for help would ring out from the next room. If the official saw that this severely upset the prisoner, he would go to the door and order the "disturbance" to be stopped. Shortly afterwards, however, it would begin again, and so it would continue for several hours. The screams which issued from the interrogation rooms and were audible every night in nearly all the cells of the remand prisons throughout the years 1937 and 1938 served the same purpose. It was difficult to imagine that a man could get used to them and end by being able to sleep peacefully through them.

In rare cases the whole paraphernalia of carrying out a death sentence by shooting would be staged. One case which we remember was that of one Serko-Byelinsky, a seventeen-year-old youth, the son of a Russian *émigré*, who had been influenced by the intensive propaganda carried out in such circles about the possibilities of finding work and obtaining higher education in the Soviet Union; he had illegally crossed the frontier from Poland, and had been arrested as a spy. A "court" was set up for his benefit, complete with prosecuting counsel and the usual trimmings. It was, however, presided over by his examining magistrate, and he was condemned to death. He was then put for several months in one of the "death cells" in which those sentenced to death awaited either execution or reprieve. Finally a "sentence" was read out to him, letting him off with twenty-five years' forced labour. He was then returned to the remand cells, and was interrogated again. In the process he was called on to write letters to friends in Poland, saying that things were going well with him, that he had found work in a sugar factory and hoped shortly to be allowed to study at a university as a worker-student.

The most frequent threats were of reprisals against members of the prisoner's family. His wife or parents would be threatened with arrest, and he would be told that his children would be put into homes for waifs and strays under false names, so that they could never be found again. A

woman of Swiss nationality, who was able to return to Switzerland after the war, supplied us with proof that such threats were actually carried out, and that after release it was impossible to trace children who had been put into such homes.

In this connection it should be stated that during the Yezhov period cases in which prisoners' families were not subjected to reprisals were rather the exception. If a prisoner's family occupied a better-than-average flat, it would invariably be evicted immediately after the arrest, and as a rule the family would lose its right to live in the city altogether. There were even different grades of deportation, which was very precisely regulated. The mildest form was to refuse a prisoner's family the right to live in the fifteen largest cities of the Soviet Union; a more severe form was to refuse it the right to live in the forty biggest cities. This milder form was comparatively rare, at any rate in the case of intellectuals, particularly if the wife had some professional occupation. As a rule "free deportation" was to a specific area chosen by the NKVD, usually to Central Asia or Siberia, in particular to Karaganda in the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan. Some towns—Alma Ata in Central Asia, for instance—were said at times to be so crowded with deported women that the female part of the population greatly exceeded the male. The arrest of a senior party or Government official was almost invariably followed by the arrest of his wife; the children were frequently put into special children's homes.

Relatives and kind-hearted neighbours were able in most cases to look after the prisoners' children, and the NKVD officials who carried out the arrest were often helpful in finding accommodation for them. It cannot be maintained that the NKVD systematically set about getting prisoners' children into its power, except in a few cases of children of highly-placed officials.

The effect of deportation was made severer by the difference in the standard of living between larger and smaller towns and between more highly and less skilled work, but what was harder to bear was the abrupt change in the attitude of friends and acquaintances. Any kind of

contact with relatives of "enemies of the people" was studiously avoided. Many acquaintances would cease to know them, and only a few individuals dared to visit them after dark to offer them help and sympathy.

Relatives of prisoners were generally dismissed from their jobs. At school the children were ostracized. Sometimes the examining magistrate, or some other NKVD official, would actually intervene on behalf of an ostracized wife and help her to find work and somewhere to live. But, so far as we know, this occurred only after the prisoner had confessed. In many cases the promise of this was used for extracting a confession. The NKVD code, or sometimes the humanity of individual officials, generally ensured that such a promise was fulfilled. After the arrests had become really widespread and prisoners' children were beginning to form sizeable groups, the ostracizing of children and young people at schools and universities was officially forbidden.

An important part in inducing confession was played by moving prisoners from cell to cell. A man who stubbornly refused to confess would be put into a specially crowded cell, or into a cell in which conditions were particularly unpleasant, and sometimes he would be kept there for many months without being interrogated at all. Prisoners were often moved from cell to cell for the sole purpose of demonstrating to them the various degrees of pressure at the disposal of the authorities and the effects that these had on prisoners.

One would, for instance, be put in a cell containing prisoners who were at the stage of interrogation during which severe beatings took place, all bearing the marks of recent maltreatment, and shortly afterwards one would be transferred to a cell all the inmates of which had already composed their "legends" and made the required confessions. Among these would be some who had been granted permission to receive food parcels and clothing, or had actually been allowed to see members of their family or to receive news about them, or had been told about what the NKVD had done in finding them work and accommodation. Tremendous optimism was often to be found in these

cells about the penalties to be expected as a result of confessing and about conditions in the camps; you would be told, for instance, that in some remote area to which you would be banished you would be able to work at your own job, that your family would be able to join you later, or even that there was going to be an amnesty soon, at latest in the autumn of 1937, on the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution.

One of the commonest and most important devices was the systematic prevention of sleep by protracted interrogation, which would often be kept up uninterruptedly for days and nights, with three or more interrogators relieving one another, and incessantly asking the accused questions about who had "recruited" him and whom he had "recruited". Ordinary interrogations were mostly held at night. Years of experience had enabled the NKVD to develop a technique of protracted interrogation which practically no one was able to resist.

There were various degrees of severity. The prisoner might be allowed to sit, or he might be made to stand, sometimes in awkward and uncomfortable positions. Continued lack of sleep has a severe toxic effect. The need for sleep ultimately displaces every other sensation, even hunger and thirst; it overcomes all resistance and displaces all power of concentration. Among the Chinese and in the Middle Ages prevention of sleep was regarded as the worst form of torture; Campanella, who withstood all other tortures, succumbed to lack of sleep. Hallucinations frequently occur; one sees flies buzzing about, one is surrounded by beetles or mice, smoke seems to rise before one's eyes and, as one usually is forced to stand during the concluding days of the process, one's feet swell into shapeless lumps. It was scarcely credible for how long some prisoners endured it. We know of a case in which interrogation went on without any break whatever for eleven days, during the last four of which the prisoner was forced to stand, and of another in which it went on for forty-eight days, with occasional breaks of two hours, during which the prisoner was not allowed to lie down but could sleep in a sitting position. Towards the end, of course, one collapsed

unconscious almost every twenty minutes, and had to be brought round with cold water or slapping.

All the methods so far mentioned were referred to in NKVD terminology as "cultural", *i.e.*, as respectable methods of interrogation, as opposed to other, more violent methods, which we shall now briefly mention. The NKVD did not always take the time and trouble to apply "cultural" methods. The interrogation frequently began with beating, particularly in the case of simple people, or those whose occupation or character suggested greater powers of resistance, such as soldiers or officials of the NKVD itself.

Beating was by far the most frequent of the violent methods employed. In milder cases it was done with the hand, but in most cases improvised objects were used for the purpose, among which broken-off chair-legs played the chief rôle. It was no accident that more suitable implements, such as whips or rubber truncheons, were not provided. Also the fact that only the examining magistrates or their assistants did the beating, and never the prison staff, indicated a desire to maintain the fiction that beating was not a regulation method, but was only carried out at the whim of the individual magistrate.

A high official of the NKVD who was himself arrested told us that, though the practice of beating was systematically introduced and applied throughout the Soviet Union, there were no written instructions about it and no mention was made of violence at the NKVD training schools; it was merely implied in verbal instructions that in all circumstances confessions must be obtained, and that beating and other forms of violence would be tolerated. It is also noteworthy that, though prisoners often suffered permanent injury, for example, to the kidneys, special care was generally taken to see that the interrogation left no permanent visible marks.

Methods of violence other than beating were used with relative infrequence; they included feeding the prisoner on highly salted foods and then letting him thirst, the use of bright spotlights and many others. These methods were used in special cases in provincial prisons. The harshest

methods, according to our information, seem to have been employed in the Lefortovo military prison near Moscow, where special cases from the whole Soviet Union were assembled.

The question why the NKVD took such trouble to extort confessions seems to us more important than the particular methods employed. The NKVD was obviously concerned to eliminate certain suspicious categories of people, among whom one would expect to find real and potential opponents of the régime. Such situations have been not infrequent in history. After the French Revolution the Jacobins enacted the famous "law against suspects" which enabled the guillotine to be used against all elements that appeared to be dangerous to the régime. The Nazis aimed at the extermination of certain categories of people, such as Jews, gypsies and educated Poles, and devised machinery for the purpose.

On the other hand the doctrine of the *Untermensch*, the sub-man, the intrinsically inferior human being, is completely foreign to Soviet ideology and the Soviet sense of justice. During the early phases of the Revolution the doctrine of the "class enemy" and discrimination against those of non-proletarian origin certainly implied differences in the value of different human beings, but the Communists never went so far as to permit the "liquidation" of individuals for no reason except membership of such a category. Even in the early days of the Revolution members of the nobility or of the former ruling class were not, except in a very few instances, shot merely because they belonged to those categories; they were always accused of counter-revolutionary activity, often without justification, it is true. The only instance in which measures were taken against a whole class without individual justification was the liquidation of the kulaks, though even in this case it was the class that was destroyed; its members were "re-educated" as good Soviet citizens by temporary forced labour.

Moreover, in the Yezhov period all discrimination had been officially dropped, and it had been solemnly proclaimed that the son was not responsible for his father. The coming into force of the Stalin constitution officially concluded the

revolutionary phase of Soviet history, and it was proclaimed that no class or section of the population hostile to the régime remained, and that the surviving opponents of the régime were merely criminal individuals.

If the Russians had followed the pattern of the French Revolution or of the Nazis and had decided simply to eliminate categories considered hostile or dangerous, they would have had to publish to the world the easily recognizable "objective characteristics" which led to the presence of so many of our comrades in the cells. Some of these "objective characteristics" included membership of categories which were officially regarded with the greatest respect, such as the whole body of senior party officials, the entire corps of senior officers, and the Red Partisans, who played such a notable part in the Revolution and the civil war.

The Soviet State had to punish its opponents, or alleged opponents, as individuals, even if their number ran into millions. The NKVD required clear proof of individual guilt, not only for foreign consumption, but also for their own people, to satisfy their own ideological sense of justice. The mass character of the arrests and the lack of factual evidence meant that clear proof was not always forthcoming. The NKVD therefore needed the confessions and the self-accusations to justify its method of operation.

There is yet another point. The country in increasing measure demanded genuine democracy. The NKVD had to justify its existence and the ever-growing part it was playing in the State machine. This is not meant to imply that Stalin and the heads of the Politburo did not know what was happening. Stalin's secretariat and Vyshinsky, the Public Prosecutor, undoubtedly received millions of complaints from prisoners and their families. But not till 1939 was any reaction discernible on Stalin's part. Instructions were then given that some of the interrogations should be reviewed. But this only happened in rare, individual cases in which some particularly important official was involved. The political leaders, like the NKVD, used the mass arrests as a justification for the continuation of the dictatorship itself, a justification which was all the more necessary

in view of the Government's official proclamation that the country had entered a phase of constitutional democracy.

There are plenty of examples in history of confession having been required as the indispensable proof of guilt. One is reminded of the Inquisition and the witches' trials, with their tortures and improbable self-accusations. Precise instructions for the extortion of confessions and for the interrogation of witches have been handed down to us in the *Malleus maleficorum*, which leaves it doubtful whether or not the interrogators themselves believed in the reality of the "legends" they extorted.

The number of NKVD examining magistrates who were perfectly aware of the unreality of the "legends", and were occasionally cynical enough to admit it, was not inconsiderable. Most of them, though they did not believe the details of the "legends", professed to believe that they contained a grain of truth, and this sufficed to justify their actions in their own eyes. But practically the whole generation of officials who conducted these interrogations disappeared, partly during the Yezhov period itself, partly in the months that followed. They were succeeded by younger men, for the most part simple people who never doubted the guilt of the accused, except in a few cases which were denounced as being the result of an "excess of zeal".

The best historical analogy is probably the famous case of the Knights Templars in fourteenth-century France. The object was to deprive the Order of Templars of all claim to its great wealth, so that it could be confiscated for the Crown. Appropriate measures of interrogation ensured that all the accused confessed to having committed the most appalling crimes in the service of Satan.

CHAPTER V

PRISON LIFE

APART from the interrogation, prison life in the Soviet Union was not so very different from that in other countries, but there were some peculiarities resulting from the mass nature of the purge and the prominent part played by it in the life of the country.

The prisons, to which arrested persons were usually delivered at night, were for the most part built in Tsarist times. The Butyrka, one of the largest Moscow prisons, contains, among other things, a tower, still in use to-day, in which Pugachev, leader of the peasants' revolt in the time of Catherine II, was confined. In all the larger towns so-called "inner" prisons had been built as annexes to the administrative buildings of the NKVD. These were usually newly constructed, with small, well-kept cells, as a rule intended for from one to four occupants. During the purge they were over-filled tenfold.

The prisons were all administered by the NKVD, but by a department different from that which conducted the interrogations. Prisoners under interrogation were kept apart from those sentenced, so that the former never learned anything about the latter's fate. The only source for such information was provided by those who, for one reason or other, were brought back from the convict gaols and labour camps for further interrogation.

Arrival in prison was followed by a physical inspection of incredible minuteness. All papers and metal objects, including belt-buckles and the like, and even bootlaces, were confiscated, and metal and horn buttons were removed from one's clothing. Every seam was examined for hidden articles, as was every orifice of the body. These physical inspections and cell searches were repeated with the same thoroughness on an average about once a fortnight. Nevertheless prisoners continually succeeded in procuring and successfully concealing forbidden articles, particularly

needles. The story circulated that an arrested conjuror in a big Ukrainian prison always stuck a needle into the coat of the official conducting the inspection.

Typical of Soviet prisons is what prisoners ironically referred to as Stalin's "care for the living person". Every possible precaution was taken to prevent them from committing suicide. We have already mentioned that all metal articles were forbidden. Nets were stretched across the well of every staircase to prevent prisoners from throwing themselves over the banisters. Prisoners were "shaved" with clippers. Hunger strikes by individuals or groups were greatly feared by the prison administration, and everything was done to break or prevent them. In the rare cases where hunger strikes occurred—in our experience there were individual cases only—the striker was forcibly fed when his weakness threatened to become fatal.

To people unacquainted with Soviet conditions, particularly those familiar with life in German Fascist prisons, it seemed inexplicable that a régime which in other respects seemed to attach so little value to individual life should make such strenuous efforts to prevent suicide. The explanation was that, while the Soviet State regarded as permissible any interference with life by the appropriate organs of the NKVD, such as the departments of interrogation and justice, and shrank from nothing in carrying out its aims, the prison administration was held strictly responsible for the life of every prisoner. This explained the paradox that in the same cell you would find prisoners suffering severely from the effects of interrogation, about which nobody bothered, while every conceivable medicine for the prevention and cure of coughs, colds and headaches was regularly distributed.

Another characteristic of Soviet prisons was the isolation to which prisoners were subjected. Prisoners shared their cells with many others and were frequently transferred from one cell to another, but steps were always taken to ensure that no prisoner ever met another whom he knew or whose case was in any way connected with his own. This was made possible by the NKVD's exact knowledge of the social circles in which everybody moved. No prisoner was ever

allowed even to see any prisoner confined in any cell but his own. Prisoners had to walk with their hands behind their backs, and were conducted along the corridors by warders. The warders, by snapping their fingers or tapping metal parts of their uniform, gave audible warning that they had a prisoner with them and thus avoided meeting others. If such an encounter occurred, however, the prisoner had to face the wall, and the greatest care was taken that he should not be able to recognize another prisoner. Any view from the prison on to the yard or the street was prevented by wooden or metal screens.

In the "inner" prisons during the Yezhov period communication with neighbouring cells by tapping was almost completely impossible. Attempts were certainly made, but you could never be sure that the tapping was not the work of an *agent provocateur*, and it was best to ignore it. In the convict and larger prisons a certain amount of tapping took place. It was rather more prevalent in the Butyrka prison in 1939 in the cells of foreigners assembled for expulsion. These were given special privileges in respect of food and treatment before their expulsion. Communication by tapping was generally based on the so-called Dekabrist alphabet, which originated among those imprisoned after the suppression of the revolt of that name in 1825. The alphabet was arranged into a square of five horizontal and five vertical lines. To indicate a letter you tapped its number in the horizontal line and then its number in the vertical line.

The only source of news and information about the outside world came from those newly arrested. At the beginning of 1940 many prisoners did not know that war had broken out. In the remand prisons letters were allowed only in exceptional cases, with the approval of the examining magistrate. However, now and then you heard news from other prisoners.

When you were transferred to a different cell everyone immediately asked who your previous cell-mates had been. Thus it was occasionally possible to get news at second or third-hand about fellow-prisoners in whose fate one was interested. As men and women prisoners never met, it was

almost impossible for prisoners to find out anything about the fate of their wives.

Transport of prisoners about the city took place in vehicles which resembled delivery vans and were often labelled "Bread" or "Meat", to make them seem harmless to the population. Inside they were divided into several compartments, ventilated by tiny holes, in which a man had barely enough room to stand or sit. Generally, however, two or sometimes even three men were crammed into each compartment. In prison jargon these vehicles were called "black ravens". In some gaols prisoners waiting for interrogation, or before and after removal to another prison, were put into what were called "kennels". These were tiny compartments in which prisoners were often kept for hours, or even for half a day at a time. Being left for hours in such cubby-holes, apparently by inadvertence, belonged to the "cultural" methods of softening up. Transport of prisoners by rail was effected in special so-called Stolypin coaches; these were ordinary passenger coaches with barred windows, in which up to twelve prisoners travelled in a single compartment.

The treatment of prisoners in Soviet prisons has varied enormously with the different phases that followed the Revolution. Immediately after it, coinciding with the zeal for reform which invaded so many other spheres, there was a period when prisons were regarded more as reformatories than as places of punishment. The treatment even of political prisoners at that time seems to have been relatively lenient and civilized. The term "prison" was replaced by the expression "house of co-operative forced labour", and, though "labour camps" were spoken of, the expression "concentration camp" came into use among examining magistrates and prisoners only after 1933. Of the period before 1937 we had no personal experience. Under Yagoda, Yezhov's predecessor, treatment gradually became more severe, and was based on the principle that the prisoner should be made to feel the full severity of his punishment. The old expressions also came into use again. The death penalty, previously officially described as "the supreme measure of social defence", now became "the supreme

penalty".[1] Political prisoners in the Soviet Union were far more severely treated than criminals. We shall discuss the preferential position of criminal prisoners later. Another contrast with most other countries was that, even apart from the interrogation methods, the treatment of prisoners before sentence was substantially more severe than it was afterwards.

With Yezhov's appointment new and much harsher prison regulations came into force. The view from the windows, for instance, was blocked with shutters, so that only a small piece of sky could be seen. All games were forbidden, particularly chess. Chess was still played a good deal, however. Prisoners kneaded their bread into chessmen, and there were a remarkably large number of good players, including some who could play blindfolded, to which nobody could object. Prisoners were also completely deprived of books, except in two Moscow prisons, the Lubianka and the Butyrka. After Beria's appointment in the middle of 1939, however, games and books were again permitted. This was a great alleviation, for the prison libraries were generally good. They contained, not only Russian classics, but translations from foreign languages and scientific and in particular historical books. During the Yezhov period the penalty for the slightest offence, such as the possession of a needle, for instance, was the "lock-up"; this was a prison within a prison, with only from one-half to two-thirds of the not very substantial normal rations. You were deprived of warm clothing and only allowed to lie down at night, and then on the stone floor.

Cleanliness in the cells varied greatly in various prisons and from place to place. In the so-called "inner" prisons of the NKVD it was generally relatively good. The cells of the famous Lubianka prison in Moscow could vie in cleanliness with any Russian, or indeed European, hotel. It had parquet floors, which the prisoners kept beautifully polished. In all the prisons in Moscow and the big provincial cities prisoners were taken to the baths every ten days and had hot showers and did their washing. Soap was issued in sufficient

[1] The death penalty was abolished on May 26th, 1947, but reintroduced on January 1st, 1950.

quantities. Disinfestation of clothing took place at the same time.

A complete contrast to the "inner" prisons, particularly those in Moscow, was provided by the so-called "big cells" of the other provincial prisons, particularly those in small towns and villages. In these the conditions were frequently appalling. To a large extent this was due to the lack of cleaning materials and the type of prisoner, usually peasants.

Until 1939 the food was adequate to keep one going, though a prison term of any length left a man emaciated and terribly weakened. It consisted of a daily ration of from 500 to 600 grammes of coarse black bread, 20 grammes of sugar, and soup, which was served twice daily, generally cabbage soup containing scarcely any nourishment. In some prisons a tablespoonful of porridge, generally made of barley, was provided, as well as hot water or *Ersatz* tea, three times a day. Those who were in prison for any length of time were always hungry, and the diet in various prisons was the staple topic of conversation.

An important part in prison life was played by the *lavochka*, or canteen. Prisoners were allowed to buy necessities and luxuries in limited quantities from the canteen, generally once a month. The sum they spent was charged against the money which was in their possession at the time of their arrest, or was sent to them by relatives. Smoking in the cells was permitted, and one could buy cigarettes. At first *makhorka*[1] could be bought too, but this was subsequently forbidden on the ground that prisoners had attempted to murder warders after throwing *makhorka* in their eyes. The sharing out of goods bought at the *lavochka* was well organized. In each cell a "charity committee" was elected, whose task it was to provide for those who had no money to spend. A contribution of from ten to twenty per cent of what they bought was levied on the more prosperous inmates.

This share-out was normally carried out with complete fairness, and all the prisoners in every cell were normally regarded as equals. At this point, however, a little story characteristic of the state of mind in Soviet prisons seems worth telling. In one cell there was a senior party official,

[1] An inferior kind of tobacco.

a member of the Central Committee, a typical, orthodox representative of the party line. One of his cell-mates was an extremely rare specimen; an obviously genuine spy, who had crossed the border from Poland and admitted he was under orders from the Polish Government. The senior party official raised the question whether a genuine enemy of the Soviet Union should take part in the share-out or not. The question was put to the vote, and it was decided by a large majority that the man should have the same share as the rest,

Complete democracy and absolute equality was the rule among prisoners. Each cell elected its *starosta*, "senior man" or "cell-leader", who maintained order and discipline, allocated sleeping places, settled disputes, etc. The prison administration fully recognized this institution in the cells. A prisoner's status depended on the time he had been in prison. The longer he had been there, the greater his prestige.

Because of the very large number of prisoners and prisons about which we acquired first- to-third-hand information in the course of several years' imprisonment, we can state with reasonable certainly that prisoners practically never failed to receive their rations regularly and in full.[1] In view of the enormous part played by food in prison conversation, we should undoubtedly have heard of irregularities, if any had occurred. In theory every prisoner had the right to complain if he thought his bread ration was short, and he was entitled to have it weighed in his presence. In practice this seldom occurred, as there were too many complaints of this kind, because hungry prisoners nearly always thought they had been given short weight.

In the "inner" prisons medical attention was relatively good, except that the victims of interrogation were entirely neglected, unless their injuries were such as might have led to fatal results. The doctors, torn between concern for the prisoners' health and fear of interfering with "the course of the interrogation", were often in a serious dilemma. One prisoner, whose ribs were broken during interrogation, was diagnosed as suffering from "neuralgia of the ribs", but

[1] This applies to the remand prisons. We had no experience of the prisons or camps to which prisoners were sent after sentence.

received the appropriate medical treatment all the same. Deaths in the cells were extremely rare. Prisoners occasionally succeeded in committing suicide, in spite of all the precautions taken by the authorities, by hanging themselves with towels or cutting their arteries with broken glass. But this was most unusual.

It was possible to have teeth extracted, and in some prisons they could even be filled. Cases of serious illness were moved to the prison hospital, where complicated surgical operations were occasionally performed. The prisoners' poor state of health resulted in fairly frequent deaths in the prison hospitals. Epidemics were rare, though, with the sanitary conditions prevailing in the "big cells" of the provincial "outer" prisons, outbreaks of dysentery were constant. General inoculations against infectious diseases, in particular typhus, were very frequent.

Infestation conditions were very varied. Lice were not uncommon in the "big cells" in provincial cities and in the prisons of the smaller towns, but they were rarer than in the Berlin Central Prison on the Alexanderplatz. Nearly every "big cell" contained bed-bugs, but the Lubianka prison in Moscow and some of the Kiev prisons were free of bugs.

According to regulations prisoners were entitled to a daily walk. This usually lasted for about ten or fifteen minutes, and as a rule took place in the tiny prison yard, cut off from the outside world by high walls. The prisoners walked round in couples behind one another, in silence and with bent head, in accordance with the rules. In some towns two guards stood at either end of the yard, with rifles at the ready. The scene was reminiscent of Van Gogh's famous picture. Because of the great overcrowding in all prisons, the walks sometimes took place at night. The scene in the dazzlingly-lit, snow-covered yard was fantastic and unforgettable. One prison yard had formerly been surrounded by trees and planted with flowers. At the beginning of the Yezhov period the trees were cut down, the flowers done away with, the yard covered with asphalt and the surrounding walls built higher and whitewashed.

A memory of such a walk which comes to mind shows typically, almost symbolically, the kind of people who were

thrown together in a cell. In front walked Father Alexander, an archimandrite of the Orthodox Church, accompanied by Levin, secretary of a party committee, member of the Central Committee of the party, a graduate of the Institute of Red Professors, and a member of the Communist Academy. Behind him walked Vasya, a soldier in the Red Army, not a member of the party but a former worker in a Leningrad factory, said to be a Bukharinist. Beside him walked Colonel of NKVD troops Sholokh, painfully dragging a leg broken at interrogation, and behind him the well-known engineer and technician Professor Lange, an agricultural machinery expert. Lange's companion was Rakita, a member of the Communist Youth and a messenger in a Soviet office, and so on down the line; all these men, of the most diverse education, nationality, origin and outlook, all equal in the eyes of the NKVD.

The terrible overcrowding of the prisons during the Yezhov period was the hardest thing that the prisoners had to bear. A cell might contain from eight to ten times the number for which it was intended. In the Moscow prisons overcrowding was easier to bear than in the provinces. The Moscow prisons had plank beds, mattresses were issued, and provision was made for prisoners to sleep under the beds, an arrangement which was ironically referred to as the "underground". By this means, and by laying boards between the beds—these were called "aeroplanes"—it was possible to accommodate up to three men to the square yard. But in provincial prisons the overcrowding was just as great, and beds and boards, even when available, had to be taken out to make room for more inmates. You slept in rows arranged like fish-bones, lying on your side. Each row had a leader, who decided when everyone should turn over; you could not lie on one side all the time, and one man could not turn over without disturbing all the rest. Some cells were even more crowded; in these you had to sleep in shifts. While half the occupants slept on the floor, packed like sardines, the remainder had to stand.

The extent of overcrowding in the prison cells, the number of prisons in any one town, the prisoners' average time of detention till his removal to a camp, the population

figures for the area from which the prisoners were drawn and the length of the purge, which had a definite relation to the degree of overcrowding, made it possible to make fairly reliable estimates of the proportion of arrests to the total population from town to town and from district to district. Calculations of this kind were often made by prisoners, usually with the help of state attorneys and NKVD officials confined in the same cell. These showed that the number of arrests during the Yezhov period must have been from five to ten per cent of the entire population. Assuming the population of the Soviet Union to have been about 150,000,000, this points to a total of at least 7,000,000 to 14,000,000 prisoners and persons living under detention in areas under NKVD administration. The figure includes the victims of former purges, including those kulaks who had not been released up to 1938.

This estimate takes into account that national republics, such as the Ukraine, Armenia and others, produced a higher percentage of prisoners than metropolitan Russia, and that the towns—and the big cities in particular—produced a higher percentage than the country. The proportion also varied in different classes of the population and different occupation groups. The proportion of arrests among the intelligentzia, railway workers, Red Army officers and other groups was substantially above the average. It should be pointed out that there was no way of arriving at a total except by making this kind of calculation and relying on information supplied by arrested NKVD officials, supplemented by the estimates of railway officials from the larger stations, who supplied figures of the average number of occupants of the prison trains which passed through daily. Calculations based on these led roughly to the same result.

In this connection another interesting fact about the total population figures for the Soviet Union seems worth mentioning. At the beginning of 1936 the Supreme Soviet decreed a general census, which was carried out with great thoroughness, to the accompaniment of a big propaganda campaign. The occupants of prisons and camps were, of course, included in the count, but the results of this census were never published. The total for the whole country was,

however, known within the walls of the NKVD and was said to have been 147,000,000. This would indicate that the population of the Soviet Union did not increase during the ten years from 1926 to 1936, *i.e.*, that the birth-rate during that period only balanced the mortality from the 1933 famine, the liquidation of the kulaks and the deaths among those deported. It was officially announced that the census was invalid, because saboteurs and criminals had taken part in it. In 1939 another census took place, the result of which was published. According to this the total population was 168,000,000.

Prisoners, when they were not talking about food, talked about their lives before their arrest. The next most important topic of conversation was the methods of interrogation and the progress of individual cases. Nearly everyone talked freely and unreservedly about his case and the course of his interrogation. Only arrested NKVD officials were reserved and maintained a gloomy silence. Uncertainty about one's fate and the eternal question "Why"? which tormented everyone naturally led to depression. Yet there were distractions. Life somehow took its course, and there was actually a great deal of laughter in the cells. It is very difficult in retrospect to understand what caused the laughter. Once, for instance, it was caused by a sailor from the Dnieper, a man of huge physique and iron nerves, who had long withstood interrogation, not so much from moral resolution or love of truth as from lack of imagination. One day he suddenly exclaimed: "I've forgotten one after all!" He explained that he had intended to denounce all the employees of the Dnieper steamship office for which he worked, and he had reeled off their names in the order in which they sat in the office. Alas! He had forgotten the shorthand-typist who sat behind the fire-screen; but he would make up for it in the morning. The hilarity that such incidents provoked is hard to conceive. Nowhere does one learn to know a man better than by the way he behaves in prison. Great friendships are formed, and men also become mortal enemies.

In many cells, particularly where the "cell-leader" was a humane and significant personality, which was often the

case, there were many earnest and serious discussions. Lectures, even whole courses, were given on the most varied subjects; literature, history, military history, science, and engineering, for instance. As many nationalities were represented among the prisoners, languages could be studied comparatively. There were even cases in which mathematical work done in prison led to the publication of original work after release. It should be remembered that this work had to be done without paper or pencil, using the most primitive expedients, such as a flat piece of soap as a writing tablet. This book originated in month-long discussions between two men in an NKVD cell.

There was also a good deal of artistic activity. The lack of books caused the art of story-telling to be developed to a pitch which can only have existed when large numbers of people were unable to read. It was in such circumstances that the epic was born. Many stories and tales from the world's literature were told in our cell which we had never read, but read later, after our release; and we can say that sometimes, though the cell version contained things that were not in the original, the artistic effect on us was greater. But extracts from literary masterpieces were not the only thing. We were also told original stories, and we met some masters of improvisation.

Prison life, which breaks some people, brings out unexpected powers of concentration and productivity in others. There were also experts in the plastic arts, who made brilliant portraits, masks and other things out of kneaded bread. These were sometimes incredibly effective. Admittedly hunger sometimes got the better of the artist, who thereupon consumed his masterpiece.

The prison administration regarded all these activities with a certain tolerance, in some cases even with good will. Generally one had the impression that the NKVD staff, in so far as it was not involved in the interrogation process and in so far as the regulations were complied with, avoided unnecessary severity and, indeed, showed a certain growing good will towards the prisoners as the end of the Yezhov period approached. The enormous number of "people's enemies", the obvious unreality of the "legends" and

confessions, were ultimately so widely admitted that they were no longer taken seriously, even by NKVD officials themselves.

In addition there were many officials of all grades, from simple warder to prison governor and even including examining magistrates, who again and again defied regulations and risked their own freedom by finding opportunities of making prisoners' lives easier by secretly giving them food or cigarettes, or even merely by speaking a cheering and comforting word to them.

Those who were aware of the atrocities in Nazi prisons and camps or had themselves experienced them—a considerable number of political *émigrés* who were handed over to the Gestapo at the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact had ample opportunity to compare the two systems—were bound to admit that there were no instances in Russian prisons of the arbitrary cruelty and systematic sadism so characteristic of Nazi methods.

The Russian language has a word *izdevatelstvo*, which means contempt for the weak or helpless. The NKVD did not, apart from its methods of interrogation, show this characteristic, in spite of all its severity, except in individual cases which were not typical of the system. Indeed, any official whom an angry prisoner might accuse of such behaviour felt deeply insulted and immediately tried to justify himself.

Even when overcrowding of the prisons was at its worst, there were special cells for privileged people in the "inner" prisons which were not overcrowded at all. At the beginning of 1939 the cells gradually began to empty, and by the end of that year the prison population, though still above normal, had noticeably diminished. The wave of arrests was receding. Arrests still took place, of course, but they were becoming rarer, and many prisoners under interrogation were released. Those arrested after the Hitler-Stalin pact, for example, included people who had made hostile remarks about German Fascism and were thus guilty of criticizing the pact.

The duration of the interrogation period varied enormously from case to case. For the majority of prisoners,

kolkhoz peasants, ordinary workmen, etc., it did not last long. With intellectuals and educated people it often lasted for a considerable time, from several months to two-and-a-half years. The average was probably from four to five months.

Sentence might be pronounced by the most varied courts or judicial bodies. By far the largest number of prisoners were sentenced in their absence by an NKVD judicial committee, either the so-called "*troika*", *i.e.*, a committee of three which met in the provincial cities, or by a "special NKVD council" in Moscow. Comparatively few cases were dealt with by a court at which the accused was present. One such court was the military board of the Supreme Court, which either sat in Moscow or travelled on "assize" to special sessions in the bigger cities. A very few cases were dealt with by the ordinary regional courts. Courts-martial were conducted without a prosecutor or counsel for the defence, and witnesses were not examined. Sentences were passed summarily after a brief reading of the charge and a final word from the accused. In the regional courts counsel for the prosecution and defence appeared only in rare cases. With the expiration of the Yezhov period and the appointment of Beria sentences by NKVD judicial committees in the absence of the accused grew rarer. It was said in the prisons that they had been abolished altogether, but we know of such convictions having taken place in 1940.

Acquittals occurred, but were extremely rare. The severity of the sentence depended less on the details of the case and the accused's confession than on who he was, his social position and the inscrutable ways of the NKVD; but the most important part was played by the time when the sentence happened to be passed. Sentences seemed to be governed by no simple guiding principle. No special significance was therefore attached to the length of a sentence, even by the accused.

When the Yezhov period was at its height, sentences of less than five years' forced labour were very rare. Normally they were for eight or ten years' forced labour, but sentences of twenty-five years' forced labour or imprisonment were not uncommon. Death sentences were said to be frequent, but

our impression is that they did not exceed ten per cent. For senior military officers, high party officials and officials of the NKVD they were said to be the rule. But it was impossible to estimate how many death sentences were carried out, for the only news from the death-cells came from reprieved prisoners who somehow got back to the remand prisons or were released; such cases occurred, particularly towards the end of the Yezhov period. When a prisoner was taken from the death-cells even his fellows did not know whether he was being led to execution or had been reprieved.

Sentenced prisoners were never sent back to their old cells, so that their fate and the conditions in the camps to which they were sent remained very much of a mystery to those who were left behind. The only information about the camps came from men who had been brought back for further interrogation, or because of a new charge.

Since both authors spent their entire time in a remand prison, they cannot speak from personal experience about removal to, and conditions in, the camps. We did, however, collect enough information on the subject to be able to report briefly on this aspect of Soviet life, particularly as one of us, before being handed over to the Gestapo, was for several months in cells occupied chiefly by foreigners intended for extradition, most of whom had spent some time in camps and penal prisons.

After sentence prisoners generally spent a few weeks or months in the so-called "transit cells" of the prisons of the provincial towns. There they awaited transfer to the concentration camp areas. They generally travelled in batches of from 1,000 to 2,000. These journeys, according to those who took part in them, were the prisoners' hardest experience. They often lasted for several months, and many described the journey as worse than life in the camps themselves. The prisoners travelled in goods trucks, which were practically unheated in winter. In summer the heat was often unbearable, and it was made worse by the tremendous overcrowding. Breakdowns in organization, inadequate food, drinking water and sanitary arrangements were said to have resulted in a considerable death-roll. The prisoners were next taken to transit camps for dispersal. From the moment

of their departure they came under the so-called "Gulag", the State Administration of Camps, an enormous organization within the NKVD. In the history of the world there has probably never been any organization to compete with it in the number of human beings for whom it has been responsible.

During the journey and in the transit camps the political prisoners made their first acquaintance with criminal prisoners. These, though a relatively small minority in comparison with the "politicals", played the chief rôle in the organization of camp labour. They enjoyed special privileges in comparison with the "politicals". They did not count as "enemies of the people", and regarded the latter with contempt. They provided the overseers and foremen, distributed the work, and filled nearly all the positions of importance to the prisoners' daily life. The "politicals'" first experience, almost without exception, was to be robbed of all their possessions, such as warm clothing and sound footwear, either on the journey or in a transit camp, or at latest on arrival at the concentration camp. The criminals drew lots for the booty and shared it among themselves. This daylight robbery took place quite openly, under the eyes of the escort, who maintained strict neutrality in the matter.

The Gulag hired out the labour force at its disposal to Soviet undertakings. Nearly every big factory and enterprise in the country had detachments of prisoners working for it. Many industrial undertakings, particularly in Siberia and other distant areas, could not have kept going without them. The Gulag had thus developed into an organization for hiring out forced labour. Whole industries in the Soviet Union were operated almost solely with forced labour supplied by it. These included the huge timber industry in the north and in Siberia, the gold mines in the Far East, and coal and metal mines in remote areas, particularly the Karaganda coal-basin in Kazakhstan. The building of important roads, canals and railways was also undertaken by it. As early as 1934 the entire production of uranium and radium and the associated industries came under Gulag. It administered areas of the Soviet Union as large as Europe.

Chief of these were the Komi Republic, which forms the north of European Russia, the Karaganda coal-basin, and the whole of northern and north-eastern Asia, notably including the basins of the two great rivers Lena and Kolyma. The gold production of the latter is said to be the second highest in the world.

The Gulag had at its disposal an enormous number of highly-qualified specialists in every sphere. Nearly all these specialists had been promised in the course of their interrogation that they would have the opportunity of doing their own work, but apart from doctors, who were generally employed as medical officers in the camps, no such thing normally occurred. In the majority of the cases which we were able to check, engineers, university professors, artists, teachers and priests had to do manual labour like everyone else; indeed, because of the unaccustomed nature of the work and the sharp practices on the part of the criminals to which they were exposed, they were liable to greater hardships than other prisoners.

The Gulag had its own construction and engineering departments, in which a few qualified technicians were employed at their own jobs, working out plans and projects in complete isolation, without any special reward. We ourselves knew of only one case of this kind. This was an engineer who was arrested because his father, a world-famous chemist, had emigrated; he was employed in a construction department of this sort in Leningrad. The NKVD was even supposed to be running a whole series of fully equipped scientific institutes in which prisoners were said to work. But, apart from an offer of the directorship of such an institute, made to one of us by a senior NKVD official and probably not to be taken seriously, we know nothing concrete about them.

The enormous size of the Gulag labour force—our estimate of up to 14,000,000 in 1938 will be recalled—and the tremendous part in Soviet life played by an organization which controls whole industries and territories have resulted in its becoming a fundamental factor in the Soviet economy. Before the war a not inconsiderable part of the world's timber production was controlled by Gulag. The importance

of Gulag was not planned or intentional. But Gulag forced labour plays such an important part in the Soviet economy that it is difficult to see how it could be dispensed with. A dissolution of the organization and the sudden release of its workers would shake the whole Soviet economy. It would result in an enormous increase in the number of qualified workers available, and necessitate the complete reorganization of whole industries and territories within the Soviet Union.

In the labour camps, as, indeed, everywhere else in the Soviet Union, so-called "norms" were set up for all work; *i.e.*, definite amounts of work had to be done by individual workers, or sometimes by groups of workers, to achieve the daily target. Those who refused to work, or were physically incapable of it, were put on such short rations that it was practically equivalent to a sentence of death by starvation. The working norms were extraordinarily difficult to fulfil, even for those used to hard physical labour. The rations of those who exceeded the norm roughly represented the normal needs of a heavy manual labourer; one kilogram of bread daily, fish soup twice daily, and now and then some dried fish, sugar, etc. Very few came into this category, mostly criminals entrusted with the task of seeing that norms were fulfilled. For those who only just reached the norm the ration consisted of from 500 to 600 grammes of bread a day, and a single hot meal of pretty inferior quality. Most prisoners were in this category. Those who failed to reach the norm received 300 grammes of bread daily and a hot meal of correspondingly reduced quantity and quality. This category included many intellectuals who, being unused to manual labour, were incapable of fulfilling the norm.

It was unanimously reported that a great deal depended on being on good terms with the criminals. Some who managed to get on the right side of them made their lives more tolerable by securing office jobs or other light work. We met, for example, the son of Ernst Torgler, the Communist leader in the German Reichstag. The boy, who was thirteen years old at the time, was presented to the public in London and Paris at meetings of protest against the

Reichstag trial in which his father was one of the principal accused. Young Torgler ultimately found asylum in Soviet Russia. After being sentenced to a long term of forced labour as a German "spy", he adapted himself so well to the rude customs of his criminal companions that he got himself the "cushy" job of removing the bodies of those who died in the camp. These were easily disposed of. The camp lay in the hilly country of the Komi Republic in the far north, near a river which was ice-bound for the greater part of the year. The bodies were merely tipped on to a specially constructed slide. They slid down to the frozen river, where they lay until the spring floods came and washed them away. After the Hitler-Stalin pact young Torgler was handed over to the Gestapo and put into a special battalion for political suspects, with which he was killed in action.

The mortality in the camps was, according to all accounts, very high, as was to be expected from the hard conditions. Organization was defective, and food supplies not always regular. Nearly everyone who returned from the camps showed signs of having had severe scurvy. It would not be far wrong to say that it took at most between two and three years for death to reduce a batch of prisoners by half.

It was generally agreed that practically no releases from the camps took place during the Yezhov period from 1937 to 1939. Those who had served their time were simply given an additional five-year sentence or sent back to the remand prison of their home town, where they were interrogated all over again and confessed to fresh crimes, for which they received further sentences. On the other hand, when important works were completed, such as the White Sea and Moskva–Volga canals, thousands or tens of thousands of prisoners were prematurely released, and some of them were decorated and their feats were extolled in the newspapers. It was, however, almost exclusively criminal prisoners who benefited from such amnesties and awards.

Before the Yezhov period it was the custom for prisoners, including "politicals" who fulfilled their norms, to receive a remission of part of their sentence. Each year of forced labour during which the norms were fulfilled counted as

two or even three years. The consequence was that a comparatively large number of prisoners were prematurely released. Under Yezhov this practice stopped completely. Under Beria, however, when the wave of arrests started ebbing, many prisoners were released from the labour camps quite independently of the term to which they had been sentenced. We know a large number of scholars and scientists who were released during this period. Some of them were reappointed to their old positions.

Our information about convict prisons is also indirect. The treatment of prisoners there was said to be somewhat better than that in the remand prisons after a prisoner's confession. The political prisoners were concentrated in a few large provincial prisons, the so-called "polit-isolators". One of the most important of these was situated in a former monastery on Solovky island in the White Sea. A persistent rumour that circulated among prisoners seems worthy of mention. This was to the effect that so-called "numbered" prisoners were confined in certain cells of the Solovky island prison and other "polit-isolators". There prisoners were said only to have had a number; their names were said to be unknown even to the prison governor. It was persistently rumoured that among these were many political personalities who had been officially condemned to death, and they were said to include many whose names had figured prominently in the big "show" trials, though their execution had been officially announced. We have first-hand information that a man in the course of being persuaded to make a confession was confronted with an acquaintance whose execution had been announced. What further truth there may have been in the "numbered prisoners" rumour we cannot say.

Until the Yezhov period so-called "free resettlement" played a certain part in the system, side by side with the prison and the concentration camp. Peasants in particular were subjected to this at the time of the liquidation of the kulaks, who were often deported with their whole families. During the Yezhov period this comparatively mild form of punishment, which consisted of allotting people homes and work in a remote area, simply became rarer. But the wives of

arrested men were frequently subjected to "free resettlement", as we have mentioned.

The phrase "free resettlement" also covered the transfer of whole populations. Such transfers took place for political and strategic reasons. Some of the wholesale removals of population will be mentioned later.

Every prisoner was told at the time of his sentence whether or not he had the right to correspond with his relatives. Those sentenced to forced labour were often granted the privilege, and parcels and letters could then be sent to them, though, according to all accounts, they seldom arrived.

The same general considerations that applied to the remand prisons applied to the convict prisons and the labour camps. The overcrowding in the latter was never so great as in the remand prisons during the peak period. In contrast to the Nazi concentration camps, where maltreatment and torture of prisoners was deliberate, in the Soviet camps the "emotional" element was completely lacking. Conditions were extremely bad and often almost unendurable, but this was the result of Soviet living conditions in the area where the camps lay, and was not due to any deliberate intention to make the prisoners suffer. At most it was the result of defective organization and muddle. Our informants agreed that the prisoners' worst sufferings were from unintended hardships.

Several thousand prisoners, for example, were taken to a place in the Siberian tundra to do some work, but when they arrived there was no accommodation of any kind, and not even material or tools with which to build huts. Sometimes the food supply broke down, or whole camps would be left without garlic for months on end. The result was that murders would be committed for a tiny piece of garlic, which throughout the Soviet prison system, including the remand prisons, was the only preventive against scurvy because of its vitamin content.

Conditions in Soviet camps may in many ways have been quite as severe as those in the Nazi camps, and yet they were of quite a different nature. Mass extermination of prisoners, experiments on them, giving them fatal injections or making

them do obviously useless work in order to humiliate them were things completely alien to the Soviet régime. Soviet severity was rational, not emotional. Conditions in the camps at that time were fundamentally dictated by scarcity and muddle.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRISONERS

It was, as we have already mentioned, very difficult to say what constituted the real criterion for arrest, why certain categories of people were almost certain to be arrested, who was in particular danger and why. The question why various people were not arrested, though to all appearances they belonged to these categories, was even more puzzling. A high officer of the Red Army, who had moved in the highest party circles, told us that he was once cheerfully greeted at a reception by Zhemchuzhina, an ex-People's Commissar and the former Mrs. Molotov, with the words: "Ah, Sasha, whatever's this, why haven't you been arrested yet?" He was, of course, arrested a few days later.

In prison you found professors cheek-by-jowl with illiterate peasants and high officials of the party sharing a cell with former officials of the Tsar. You met people of all educational levels, occupations and nationalities.

The number of men prisoners far exceeded that of women. The proportion was difficult to estimate, but it may have been five to one. Most prisoners seemed to be between the ages of thirty and fifty-five, though we also met fifteen-year-old peasant boys and the ninety-year-old former Tsarist General Patoski, who had become the director of a museum. He confessed to having been "recruited" for espionage by the Duke of Parma.

A possible basis for classification of prisoners might have been by their attitude to the Soviet régime in general and the orthodox party line in particular, at that time represented by the Yezhov policy of the NKVD. But people of every political shade were represented, from embittered enemies of every kind of Socialism to those who even after their arrest remained completely loyal to the party line.

To a certain extent the NKVD cells were a microcosm, reflecting in miniature all the trends prevailing in the Soviet Union. Among the prisoners there were undoubtedly many

opponents of the Soviet régime, opponents of Socialism in general and of Soviet Communism in particular. Former officials of the Tsarist régime and former big and small landowners were naturally hostile to the régime, and the whole Soviet ideology was normally rejected by the older generation of peasants and petty bourgeoisie. As membership of any of these groups itself constituted one of those "objective characteristics" which invited arrest, even if no anti-Soviet activity could be established, opponents of the régime were proportionately more numerous in NKVD prisons than among the population at large. Nevertheless they constituted only a relatively small proportion of the prison population. Furthermore, prisoners could express themselves with an incomparably greater degree of freedom than anyone else in the Soviet Union. True, there were prisoners who, to better their position or under pressure from the interrogation authorities, would denounce their cell-mates for anti-Soviet talk, and it was not uncommon for prisoners to be brought to account for this by the examining magistrates. But on the whole there existed among the prisoners the feeling that they had little more to lose, and they therefore expressed their views with a frankness which was to be found nowhere else in the Soviet Union. It can be claimed that without long residence in the NKVD cells it is impossible to find out what the Soviet people really feels and thinks.

An important factor in a prisoner's political attitude was the generation to which he belonged. The older generation, which knew the pre-Revolutionary régime and went through the Revolution, the civil war and the New Economic Policy, reacted and felt quite differently from the younger generation which grew up under the Soviet régime. Apart from those who had been directly injured by the Revolution and its consequences, there was to be found, particularly among quite simple people, a fundamental aversion to Communism on moral grounds. The violence of its methods and the apparent arbitrariness of its actions, particularly in the years of collectivization and the liquidation of the kulaks, had left behind a hard core of irreconcilable hostility, combined, it is true, with complete resignation. The thought of engaging in any form of political activity was entirely foreign to these

people. They had no political aims; their only concern was for their family and for themselves. Their sole ambition was to find themselves a corner in the Soviet Union where they would be as sheltered as possible from the régime and its rigours. In the talk of the prisoners of the older generation, whether they were workers, peasants or intellectuals, reminiscences of the "good old days" of before the Revolution played the largest part.

Heartfelt opposition to the régime among the older generation of prisoners was also to be found among those belonging to classes which benefited from the Revolution and actually brought it about; that is to say, among the workers, soldiers and sailors who were the vanguard of Bolshevism and were the real supporters of the October Revolution.

In the first place they were disillusioned by the social changes of the thirties, which led to cleavages in society no less profound than those of Tsarist times. The new policy of the régime, the "struggle against egalitarianism", seemed to these people a betrayal of the true aims of the Revolution. The revival of nationalism, the reintroduction of reactionary ways of life, the reintroduction of commissioned rank in the army, not least the complete destruction of workers' influence and control in the factories, introduced under the slogan of "improving labour discipline", and finally the total suppression of any real democracy within the party and the trade unions, led these former revolutionary workers to renounce Communism, or at least the official party line. Their disillusion was expressed in the question they openly asked: "Is this what we fought for?"

But it was the liquidation of the kulaks and the famine of 1933 which played the biggest part in disillusioning, not only peasants, but workers as well. There had been a famine, in 1921, the result of the chaos caused by the civil war and that year's great drought and bad harvest. Yet popular feeling about the 1933 famine was quite different. The famine of 1921 was regarded as the result of natural causes and circumstances beyond anybody's control. But the famine of 1933 was caused solely by the régime's administrative measures, the forcible collection of the previous year's

harvest, the inadequate cultivation of the land and the compulsory dispossession and eviction of a large part of the peasantry under the slogan of "liquidating the kulaks". The fact that a large part of the urban working class was of country origin, that nearly every worker still had relatives on the land and knew what happened to them, though the famine was officially kept secret, produced a lasting indignation among the workers, though succeeding years brought about an improvement in the situation.

The older generation looked back to the past which, seen from the perspective of the present and through prison bars, may have looked rosier than it really was, but the younger generation had grown up in Soviet conditions and knew nothing else. They took the Revolution for granted and accepted the structure of the Soviet State as a matter of course. Their criticism was directed, not at the Soviet State or at Communism, but at Stalinism and the present party line. The younger generation's complete acceptance of the Soviet State did not imply that it was politically uncritical and knew nothing of conditions outside the Soviet Union. One effect of the Revolution was undoubtedly to shake the great mass of the Russian people out of its political lethargy and make it think. Social conditions were not taken as a matter of course, and the masses have become infinitely more mature politically.

The "iron curtain" between the Soviet Union and the non-Soviet world was not nearly so impenetrable from the Soviet side as it was from the west. The intellectually alive Soviet citizen, even of the younger generation, knew far more about living conditions abroad than the average foreigner knew about those in the Soviet Union. This was the more remarkable in that abroad Soviet conditions could be freely reported, while the Soviet population had to rely for its knowledge of foreign countries on a very few channels of information, such as translations of old and modern foreign literature, which were extraordinarily widely circulated, and acquaintance with foreigners and people who had been abroad.

Items of news on the wireless and scattered about newspapers and magazines provided the interested reader, who

was used to reading between the lines, with a not inconsiderable knowledge of what went on abroad. This knowledge was encouraged by a passionate interest in everything foreign. This was particularly prevalent among the young. But it was chiefly fed by the automatic scepticism with which all official news comes to be treated in a totalitarian State. Their artificial isolation frequently causes the younger generation to over-estimate foreign countries, and the Soviet Government repeatedly finds itself compelled to campaign against this. In 1947 another such propaganda campaign was in progress with the object of proving the superiority of Russian civilization to that of other countries. This indicated the existence of a strong tendency to think the reverse.

The younger generation, though by and large approving the structure of the Soviet State, violently criticized the Government's actions, and in particular the authoritarian control of State and party. The attitude of young people, particularly members of the Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, towards Stalin contrasted significantly with the position enjoyed by Lenin as leader of the Revolution. For Lenin the great mass of the people had a warm feeling of love and respect. The feeling for Stalin, even on the part of his most faithful followers, never had this quality. At most it was a feeling of esteem, combined with a rationally based appreciation of the need for discipline and authority.

It is frequently said that the leadership cult in the Soviet Union, as expressed in the innumerable obligatory portraits and busts of Stalin and other leaders, can be explained by the Russian national character, and seems odd and ridiculous only to the western European. This is by no means the case. The leadership cult seemed as unnatural in Russia as it does anywhere else. It had a definitely artificial, imposed-from-above character. It was regarded as ridiculous by the young Communists themselves, and was only excused by its alleged propagandist effect on the "immature masses".

Soviet youth reads the "classics" of the Revolution, Marx, Engels and Lenin, as well as the fine pre- and early Revolutionary literature of Herzen, Nekrassov, Chernyshevsky, Saltykov, Tolstoy, Gorky, Mayakovsky, Blok, etc., which, as it forms the official basis of Soviet ideology, cannot

be withheld from them. In these it finds occasion for comparison between Soviet reality and the ideals of the Revolution, as well as an inexhaustible fount of opposition to the régime.

The chief subjects of criticism among the younger generation, as among the older, were the liquidation of the kulaks and the renunciation of the ideals of the Revolution. Other subjects of criticism were the régime's continual political and economic miscalculations, with their severe consequences, never admitted as such and always blamed on subordinates, and the frequent and violent changes in the party line. In student and Komsomol circles, for instance, the pact with Hitler and the war against Poland and Finland were highly unpopular.

The people were increasingly demanding democracy and, even if young people to an extent recognized the party's dictatorial rôle as a political necessity, this only intensified the desire for democracy within the party.

We have already mentioned that prisoners in the cells of the NKVD freely expressed opinions which in the world outside would have been communicated only to an intimate friend and never in the presence of a third party. It was therefore very easy to convince oneself of the necessity of the political events of the Yezhov period. After the murder of Kirov the Government was faced with the choice of either granting the democracy the people demanded—which would have meant the surrender of power by Stalin and his entourage—or of continuing on the path of increasing authoritarianism, involving the violent purge which in fact took place.

The most violent criticism and hostility, however, were roused by the methods used in the purge, the growing importance of the NKVD within State and party and, above all, the arrests themselves. Practically every Soviet citizen had relatives and friends in prison of whose innocence he was well aware, notwithstanding the much publicized confessions. The removal of every real, potential or supposed enemy of the régime only created more enemies for it. The result, apart from the tremendous intimidation achieved, was the exact opposite of what was intended. Instead of

popularizing the régime and liquidating its enemies, it merely served to antagonize the population. So in the end the régime was forced to put an end to the process.

The number of cases in which a man's arrest provided the final impetus which drove him to abandon his loyalty to the Stalin régime was very noticeable. Many, indeed most, of the arrested officials and supporters of the régime had, in spite of growing reluctance, tried to deny its defects and explain them away. They had loyally carried out the party line for years, often against their will and out of a fanatic sense of discipline, and thus they had made themselves guilty of its crimes in their own eyes. It was only arrest and closer acquaintance with NKVD methods that finally robbed them of their faith. In our view this provides the most important clue to the ease with which Soviet officials are persuaded to make false confessions. Nearly every supporter of the régime, before falling a victim to it, has in his time been involved by it in actions which have conflicted with his political conscience, even if his guilt has only been glossing over and justifying its defects and mistakes. It is far easier for a real political enemy to find the strength to resist than it is for a man who falls victim to a régime which he has himself supported.

For many officials inner renunciation of the party line would mean the complete collapse of their universe. So it was intelligible that many, even after their arrest, tried to remain orthodox, sought to attribute their arrest to the blunders of minor officials or "Fascist saboteurs" inside the NKVD, expressed the conviction that Stalin and the Politburo knew nothing of these methods and happenings, and demanded from themselves and their cell-mates loyalty to the very end, and gave their confession, and in many cases their lives, to the State authority out of party discipline, as they understood it.

We now propose to enumerate and describe the various categories of prisoner. Such a procedure is naturally somewhat arbitrary. In many cases the categories overlapped. You could not always be sure whether an individual owed his arrest to the fact that he held a leading position in the Communist Party or to the fact that his name sounded

Polish. Membership of any of the categories we shall describe constituted an "objective characteristic" which was sufficient reason for arrest, though it did not make it inevitable. In nearly every category some people escaped arrest. We can even quote cases of German Communists who were not arrested, though they were political refugees. The Yezhov purge came to a natural end and failed to include everyone who came within the categories. The time when a man was arrested, or whether he were arrested at all, might depend on all sorts of local factors, the zeal of an examining magistrate, or sheer chance.

Outside the Soviet Union it is taken for granted that there is a direct connection between a man's imprisonment and some offence he has committed, or at least has been accused of. People take this so much for granted that they find it hard to understand that in the Soviet Union no such necessary connection exists. Arrests in Russia—this was particularly the case at the time of the purge—are based on an entirely different system. For an analogy one cannot do better than to refer to the statistical determinism of modern physics. According to this, the fate of an individual atom in a given set of circumstances cannot be foreseen. All one can say about it is that in such-and-such circumstances there is a degree of probability, which can be stated mathematically, that so-and-so will happen. The same was more or less true of individuals in Russia. The causes that led to imprisonment were the now familiar "objective characteristics"; it was sufficient to belong to one of the categories to be considered in detail below. A comparison is provided by what happens in time of war, when enemy aliens are automatically interned, or by what happened in Nazi Germany, when being a member of one of the persecuted races involved penalties that had nothing whatever to do with personal guilt. But there was an important difference. In the case of an enemy alien in war-time, or a Jew in Nazi Germany, the unpleasant consequences were practically inevitable. They were not inevitable in the case of a member of one of the compromising categories in the Soviet Union. His chances of escaping were by no means negligible. Generally speaking, the higher the rank of the person

concerned, the less likely he was to escape; and in the case of someone who had the misfortune to belong simultaneously to more than one category, *e.g.*, a Soviet party official who had been a member of a Soviet mission abroad, the chances of his escaping arrest were diminished in accordance with the laws of mathematical probability.

Whether any particular individual was arrested or not depended on a host of secondary factors, such as the state of overcrowding of the prisons, the state of the NKVD files, the personality of the official concerned, the amount of denunciations that had come in, any damaging confessions, etc., etc. Incidentally the last two factors did not seem to play a particularly important rôle. In the great majority of cases there was no point whatever in asking the reason for an individual arrest.

Some people managed to escape arrest by "knowing the ropes". A well-known scholar told me that his friends, including a number of experienced Communists, advised him at the time of the purge to pretend to be a drunkard, and occasionally to give his lectures when slightly under the influence. This enabled him to escape the first purge of specialists at the beginning of the thirties. Another favourite dodge was frequently to change one's job and place of residence. It always took a considerable time, at least six months or a year, before the local NKVD started paying attention to a new worker in a Soviet undertaking. It took time to accumulate sufficient secret reports, commonly known as "material", about him, and there was an inevitable delay until he had filled in enough questionnaires to be put in a particular category, and until his NKVD personal file and secret documents had been forwarded from his previous place of work—particularly as all such documents were despatched by special NKVD express messenger and not through the ordinary post. This meant that it took a very long time to reach its destination, and sometimes did not arrive at all.

Another way of avoiding arrest which was used by many party and Soviet officials was to have oneself arrested for some minor criminal offence, such as careless accounting or squandering State funds. A well-known teacher, for example,

who, after being "checked-up", was afraid of losing his job and being arrested for deviation from the party line, escaped arrest by getting drunk and creating a disturbance in a public park. The result was that six months later he was able to find a new job in a different neighbourhood.

Finally, a certain tendency was discernible to leave a few people free in each of the arrest-worthy categories, to demonstrate that membership of one of them did not automatically lead to arrest and to render plausible the personal guilt of each accused. Thus among those not arrested were several senior officers of the Red Army, such as Zhukov and Shaposhnikov, and a few prominent leaders of the Communist parties of European countries, such as Pieck and Ercoli.[1] Among scientists and scholars membership of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, but not of that of the Ukraine or other Republics, seemed to bestow a certain, though by no means universal, immunity, so that most of the older academicians were spared. We know of cases in which scientists in the provinces, who had had tremendous political difficulties at the "check-up" meetings and were definitely threatened with arrest, transferred themselves to one of the academic institutions in Moscow and either escaped arrest altogether or were released after a relatively short time.

The Categories

(1) *The Party Organization*

The first category we shall deal with is that of the senior and middle ranks of the Communist Party itself. To the uninitiated it may seem strange that an active rôle in the country's ruling party should form an "objective characteristic" leading to arrest. But there is no denying that, apart from those at the very top, a few members of the Politburo and the holders of a few of the most important offices in the country, nearly all senior party officials were arrested between 1936 and 1939. Among them were all the secretaries of the provincial committees, nearly all the secretaries of the

[1] Now known under his real name of Togliatti.

regional, district and town committees, and of the committees attached to the most important industrial undertakings, trusts, transport concerns and factories. The party secretaries of other bodies, such as universities, training colleges, broadcasting committees, publishing concerns, etc., were also arrested. In this connection it should be noted that in all party organizations in the Soviet Union the secretaryship is traditionally the office held by the real leader of the organization. This is because Stalin has been the secretary of the party since Lenin's time.

The arrest of senior party officials during the Yezhov period was something for which the Soviet Union was completely unprepared, but it was characteristic of the period. We shall discuss it in greater detail later. Here we shall merely point out that the result was the creation of a completely new party organization, though with the same people at the summit. A leading scholar, asked by one of us why so many native and foreign Communists were arrested, replied: "What do you expect? Communists are people who have criticized their own Government and have shown they are capable of taking action against it. How can such people be left in leading positions in the Soviet Union?" No doubt this answer contains an element of truth.

Three main types were discernible among the arrested party officials. First came the Old Bolsheviks, generally former workers, soldiers or sailors. Many of them had joined the party out of idealism. In the course of years of responsible administrative work within the party many of them had attained a high degree of culture and a large store of practical knowledge. The great majority were serious people with a sense of responsibility. The Trotskyists and Bukharinists had been eliminated, but the main body of party members of this type, though by no means always genuinely in sympathy with the party line, had kept quiet and therefore remained. Among the older party members this was in fact the predominant type. They could not understand that the Soviet Union had entered a phase in which those who had fought for revolutionary ideals were no longer wanted. They had reluctantly but obediently helped to carry out the liquidation of the kulaks; yet now they had to fall, to make

way for the new party. Vergniaud's famous phrase about the Revolution devouring its own children might have been coined specially for these people.

The next type consisted of the genuinely convinced supporters of the Stalin party line. Among them were men who based their whole lives on party discipline, to which they adhered with religious fanaticism. The ideal for which they were willing to make any sacrifice was not the man Stalin, but the party, embodied in the Politburo, with Stalin at its head. They often confessed willingly, and without any special pressure being brought to bear on them, because the party, embodied in the NKVD, demanded this sacrifice from them for reasons of its own which it did not choose to communicate to them.

A typical representative of this group was Levin, former secretary of a district committee and member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and a party member since 1917. He was, incidentally, the brother-in-law of the famous Shcherbakov, secretary of the Moscow party committee and later a member of the Politburo, but this relationship did not help him. He returned to the cell weeping after the examining magistrate had told him that his wife had divorced him as an enemy of the people. In the cell he continued to regard himself as a champion of the orthodox party line. He would not tolerate the slightest criticism of the régime or any expression of dissatisfaction with it. He never failed to denounce the "deviations" or ideological errors that cropped up in conversation or in the lectures given by prisoners. His class vigilance was admirable. His character was stainless and inflexible, and he remained a true idealist to the bitter end. Once he told an instructive fable, which, with its childish moral, is typical of the outlook of a large part of the Soviet population:

"A mother punishes her child for some foolish act of which it is innocent," he said. "The child resents the injustice, weeps and goes to its father for comfort. Its father says: 'Mother has treated you wrongly. Let us find a new mother.' But the child bursts into tears and throws itself into the arms of its mother, its unjust mother, who has wrongly punished it, but is still its mother."

In one respect Levin was right. A large part of the Soviet population, though dissatisfied with individual aspects of Soviet rule, regards the Soviet régime as its own beloved mother, and wants no other.

The third type of party official was in striking contrast to the others. It consisted of men who joined the party at a later stage, mainly as a means of satisfying personal ambition. It consisted, in fact, of the careerists. They accepted party discipline as a matter of course, had acquired great skill in smelling out the party line on every question, and followed every one of its twists and turns with great agility. So consistent was their loyalty to the party that they were often more royalist than the king. As Soviet life grew more hierarchical they accepted as a well-earned tribute the amenities which their privileged position increasingly provided.

A considerable number of non-members of the party, so-called non-party Bolsheviks or Soviet activists, for whom admission to the party represented the summit of their ambitions, also belonged to this type. Alas! they found themselves in prison in spite of all their party zeal and loyalty, all because of the high positions they had reached. They were succeeded by younger party officials, generally of the same type.

Occupants of these posts were arrested in rapid succession. Changes took place so rapidly that, as we have mentioned, officials seemed to succeed one another in shifts. The result was that it was this last type which became predominant. The shortness of their tenure of office was not, perhaps, part of a deliberately imposed system, but it led to something very characteristic of the Soviet Union. People of their type tended, in their unscrupulousness and zeal, to carry the party line to absurd extremes, with the result that their actions had later to be explained away as deviations. People of this type were also inclined by nature to corruption and the exploitation of their positions for personal advantage. They thus roused the hatred and envy of the people, and in particular the hatred and envy of their juniors. This further contributed to the shortness of their stay in office.

(2) *Red Partisans, Old Bolsheviks and Political Convicts*

A very special part in the civil war was played by the so-called Red Partisans. For years they carried on guerrilla warfare in the rear of the White Army and contributed decisively to the Communist victory. To have been a Red Partisan was always regarded as a very high honour in the Soviet Union, and officially it is still so regarded to-day. In times of shortage, and before the abolition of the food-card system, they received special rations and enjoyed special privileges. They were allowed, for example, to travel on the front platforms of trams, which was a tremendous privilege in Russia, where the trams are always terribly overcrowded. All Red Partisans were members of an association which enjoyed the special support of the Soviet authorities. In 1936, however, the leaders of this organization, and in succeeding years practically all its members, were arrested.

Red Partisans were to be found in every cell. Among them were many who had appeared as heroes in Soviet literature and films and had become legendary popular figures. We ourselves met in the cells such people as Krapiviansky, organizer of a resistance movement against the German army of occupation in 1918, who had just been appointed chief of the forced labour camp for the building of the projected electricity works on the Volga Canal, and Baron, who had been adjutant to Shchor, a dead hero of the partisan war. One venerable old man deserves special mention; Dubovoy, ex-peasant and famous Red Partisan, who with his long white beard had adorned the chair at international congresses as the archetype of the Russian revolutionary peasant. He had been elected president of the International League of the Godless at Prague and had played a leading rôle in anti-Church agitation in the Soviet Union. He had now lost his beard, which, he told us, had been plucked out one hair at a time by the examining magistrate. This painful method of interrogation had hurt him less than the loss of his symbol of dignity, from which he suffered acutely.

Most of the Red Partisans were accused of counter-revolutionary plotting. What we said above about the Old Bolsheviks applies to them to a particular degree. They could

not understand that in the new age in the Soviet Union they were superfluous and were being got rid of.

The political convicts of Tsarist times, many of whom had spent years in the *katorga* doing penal servitude under the Tsar, or in exile, must be put in the same category as the Red Partisans and the Old Bolsheviks. These were also organized in their own associations and were now nearly all victims of the purge. They were accused of having been recruited by the Tsarist Okhrana, the former secret police, as spies and *agents provocateurs* for counter-revolutionary activity in case the Revolution should succeed. These people had sacrificed the best years of their lives to the struggle against the Tsarist régime, and such accusations were correspondingly insulting. But the interrogation methods were such as to compel them to make suitable confessions. It is intelligible that such people, when they compared the conditions of political imprisonment under the Tsar with those of the Yezhov period, should put up little resistance. Almost without exception the descriptions of their experiences in the time of the Tsar sounded idyllic in comparison with what they were undergoing now. The associations of former political *katorga* convicts were officially dissolved, as were those of the Red Partisans.

(3) *The Army*

The art of the dictator consists in maintaining a lasting balance between the different elements in the State on which his power depends, playing off one against the other and above all seeing that none becomes too powerful. Not infrequently a special organ exists for the support of the dictator in this rôle, an organ which keeps all the others in a state of anxiety. Its special task is protecting the security of the dictatorship.

To the extent that the NKVD developed into such an organ under the direct control of the dictator, a State within a State, so the power of other organs had to be broken. After the liquidation of the remnants of Trotskyism and of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, and the defeat of the most powerful party of the Comintern outside Russia, the dictatorship set out on the path of imperialism and military

conquest. An important part in this was intended for the Red Army, which therefore had to be securely and unconditionally in the hands of the dictator.

Outward signs of this change of policy had begun to appear. The senior officers' corps had begun to be aware of its importance. It was favoured with specially good living conditions, and high officers were given good residences and high pay. They started living in luxurious style. Feasts and banquets were the order of the day, and the traditional liaison between the ballet and the corps of officers had been re-established. Senior officers began to feel largely independent of the party and the NKVD. Jokes about the party leaders became rife in military circles. "Life was better, life was happier."

It is possible that the idea of a military dictatorship may have been toyed with in some circles. Whether there was a "Bonapartist plot", as was officially maintained and widely believed even abroad, is a problem as baffling as that of the Kirov murder. We ourselves believe there was no such plot, and this coincides with the interpretation put on events by the overwhelming majority of the Soviet intelligentzia, and in particular the arrested officers themselves.

The facts at any rate are that Marshal Tukhachevsky, leader of the campaign against Poland in 1920, whose picture was to be found in every schoolbook, was arrested and sentenced *in camera*; it was then announced that he had been shot. His arrest was followed by many others. The commander-in-chief of nearly every military command in the Soviet Union was arrested, among them Yakir, one of the best-known figures in the Red Army, a typical representative of the new leaders of the officers' corps produced by the Revolution. Gamarnik, chief of the political administration, committed suicide.

From an account to which we had access and which seemed thoroughly reliable, we learned that two of five Marshals of the Soviet Union escaped arrest, two of fifteen army commanders, 28 of 58 corps commanders, 85 of 195 divisional commanders, and 195 of 406 regimental commanders. The arrests were not limited to the higher ranks. According to the estimates of arrested officers, from 60 to

70 per cent of officers of field rank must have been arrested. From these figures it was clear that the higher an officer's rank, the greater was his chance of arrest. An ordinary major, for instance, or an officer below field rank, was not very likely to be arrested merely because he was an officer. Many junior officers to be found in the cells had been arrested for quite different reasons, *e.g.*, belonging to a national minority or having been abroad, or having had some sort of link with foreign countries.

The civilian staff of administrative and technical or educational bodies connected with the army also came within the military category. For instance, nearly the whole instructional and administrative staff of a military academy in the Ukraine was arrested, including the shorthand typists.

Among the officers there were two main types. In the first place, particularly among the higher ranks, there were those who had been officers before the Revolution and had joined the Red Army at the time of its creation. Lenin pointed out in one of his famous speeches that a by no means negligible proportion of the pre-Revolutionary officers' corps was fighting in the Red Army. Tukhachevsky himself was one of these.

There were also officers of working-class origin or promoted from the ranks who had taken an active part in the October Revolution and the civil war and owed their promotion to this fact. A typical example was a certain Major Massily,[1] who had been in command of a unit of frontier troops on the Polish border. He had been one of the famous sailors of the battle-cruiser Aurora, whose intervention at the time of the fall of the Provisional Government had contributed to the success of the October Revolution. A typical child of the Revolution, a man of complete integrity and great strength of character, he had in the course of years acquired for himself a high degree of education, in which he may well have been helped considerably by his marriage to an obviously highly-cultured woman belonging to pre-Revolutionary intellectual circles. He had a great love

[1] It should be noted that in this and other cases names have been changed to avoid harming living persons or their relatives.

of Russian literature and a thorough knowledge of the classics. He also had a good knowledge of history, and his lectures in the cell on literary and historical subjects were delivered with the same ease as the course he gave us on military matters and the campaigns of Napoleon, for which he was qualified by having passed through the military academy. He was accused of espionage and participation in an anti-Soviet Fascist plot, and was one of the few who did not confess, in spite of the utmost severity and torture. He apparently benefited from the fact that his bearing while being beaten made such an impression on one of his examining magistrate's superiors that he ordered it to stop. His case was also exceptional in the fact that he appeared before a court-martial, was acquitted and released. He returned to Leningrad and found work as a fitter at the Putilov works. Admittedly he was rearrested after six months, and it was then that one of us met him. We do not know what happened to him subsequently.

The fate of Colonel Sholokh, formerly adjutant to Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, was somewhat different. He too had been the commander of a frontier unit. He was a worker by origin and had taken an active part in the civil war, and he had made a confession, which he had withdrawn at his court-martial. The court had ordered a re-examination of his case which had resulted in a series of broken bones, so that after his recovery he could not walk unaided. Nevertheless he kept his cell-mates constantly entertained with his stories and witticisms.

The effect that the purge must have had on the country's resources and defensive power was illustrated by the case of an administrative officer who was responsible for a large supply camp in a town in the Donetz basin. The confession required of him was that, at the bidding of a Trotskyist organization and German Fascist agents, he had made the food unusable by poisoning it or intentionally letting it go bad. Several doctors and members of committees of inquiry sent to examine the food were also arrested. After that the newly appointed staff did not dare to assume responsibility for it, and all the food stored at the camp had to be destroyed.

(4) *The Transport Organization*

Even before the October Revolution railwaymen had acquired a special position in relation to the rest of the working-class, among whom they regarded themselves as a kind of aristocracy. They were better paid, their trade union organization was better, and railwaymen's families were inter-connected by marriage. The job of railwayman often passed from father to son. Their position in some ways had a good deal in common with that of a large part of the working-class in western Europe. In this connection it is interesting to note that the railwaymen's union did not rally to the Bolsheviks at the time of the October Revolution, and even attempted active resistance.

Though all political opposition had long since been stifled, the railwaymen had maintained their special position throughout the Bolshevik era. The beginning of industrialization and the 1933 famine pushed the transport system into the foreground of public interest or, to put it in Soviet terminology, made it the critical bottleneck in the national economy. Kaganovich, one of Stalin's closest colleagues, whose part in Soviet history was repeatedly to undertake tasks of exceptional difficulty, became People's Commissar for Transport. An organization as powerful as that of the railwaymen in the hands of a personality as important as Kaganovich was bound to be regarded as a potential danger to the dictatorship, and the NKVD was bound to look at it with jealous eyes.

Membership of the organization of the People's Commissariat for Transport became one of the "objective characteristics" which led to arrest. The higher the rank, the greater was the likelihood of arrest, though, other things being equal, a railway official stood less chance of being arrested than a soldier. From the Government's point of view it was essential that the railwaymen's pride and independence should be broken, just as that of the engineers had been broken a few years earlier, when the "show" trials of engineers had taken place. The railways worked badly; there were continual references to their deficiencies in the Press. As in other spheres, the Government regarded intimidation as the most effective means of improving the

railwaymen's discipline and of getting more work out of them. To what extent the mass arrests achieved this aim or its direct opposite by replacing experienced staff by younger staff lacking in experience, we are not prepared to say.

The holders of nearly all senior administrative posts were arrested, and the stationmasters of nearly every station in the Soviet Union seemed to have been involved in plots and to be confessing accordingly. Disorganization of traffic afterwards became more frequent than ever and was invariably interpreted as a political crime. The existence of a real "objective fact" was a not infrequent feature of a railwayman's arrest. The railway accidents so common in Russia are almost invariably regarded as acts of political sabotage and result in arrests and confessions. They are nearly always kept secret from the public. Only when there is a "show" trial does the public hear anything about them. Incidentally there were special departments of the NKVD concerned exclusively with the railways, and an NKVD guard is posted at all big stations. Special railwaymen's prisons were now set up in the bigger towns. In smaller towns, such as Poltava, coaches were shunted to unused sidings and arrested railwaymen were packed into them like sardines and kept there for months. Special military courts were established and travelled from town to town to deal with serious cases.

A special case was provided by about 40,000 railwaymen, with their families and all associated personnel, who, by Russo-Chinese agreement, had been stationed in Manchuria until about 1937. These unfortunates had two "objective characteristics". At the time of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria the Soviet Union had stood up for them with an energy that nearly led to war, and they had been extolled in the Soviet Press as particular heroes and champions of Soviet interests on foreign soil. But now, practically without exception, they were branded as Japanese spies and confessed that they had been recruited for Japanese espionage purposes.

(5) *Technicians and Specialists*

The position with regard to specialists and technicians in industry generally was similar. Industrialization demanded

the complete intimidation of the people vital to its implementation. At the beginning of the thirties a great campaign, with many arrests and "show" trials, had been launched against them, and the régime could therefore credit itself with having suppressed all ideological resistance within this group and could count on its complete intimidation. That campaign, however, had been exclusively directed against technicians of the pre-Soviet era.

At that time those who had grown up in the Soviet era were still very few. Leading engineers had then confessed to the existence of an illegal "industrial party", whose aim was said to have been the seizure of power in the Soviet State. But this campaign had passed over relatively quickly. A large number of the arrested engineers and specialists, particularly those who had confessed to sabotage, had been set free again and had gone back to work at their old jobs; many had even been promoted. But in the Yezhov period they nearly all went back to prison again—particularly those who had previously refused to confess. But this time they were accompanied by a large number of their younger, Soviet-trained colleagues, who had grown up in the meantime and were held up as an object of special pride in innumerable propagandist publications put out by the régime. The older specialists, incidentally, confessed without much pressure being put on them, but their younger colleagues often put up a stubborn resistance.

The purge of technicians began with a series of "show" trials of leading figures in the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry, among whom Piatakov, the deputy People's Commissar, was the most important. He had been the real leader and chief executive in the creation of the new Soviet heavy industry. The People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry was under the control of Sergo Orjonikidze, a Georgian, one of Stalin's closest colleagues and a member of the Politburo. Seldom has the opinion of all who had anything to do with him been so unanimously favourable about a personality in such a high position. Unlike so many leading figures in Soviet life, his modest, kind and honourable character was universally admired, and his qualities had gained him the affection and respect of his subordinates. He

died shortly after the trial of Piatakov. Whether he was murdered or not cannot be established, but the rumour was in general circulation and still persists. To us it seems more probable that this old and sick man could not survive the destruction of his organization and the loss of his closest and most loyal colleagues.

The arrest of the leading engineers in the People's Commissariat for Heavy Industry was followed by innumerable arrests of managers and specialists. A similar course was followed in the other People's Commissariats, those for Light Industry, Food, the Timber Industry, Agriculture, and others, and was pursued into the scientific and technical research institutions.

The fact that this was not the first purge of engineers meant that it attracted less notice than it would otherwise have done. Being an engineer or technician did not in itself involve great probability of arrest, unless other factors were also present, such as membership of the party, being a manager or having had connections with foreign countries, etc.

As an interesting example of a representative of the technical intelligentzia we would quote a forester who held an important post in the People's Commissariat for Forestry and the timber industry in the Ukraine. He had appeared in a "show" trial at the beginning of the thirties and had confessed that he had had too little timber felled in order to spare the woods for their former owners, the restoration of whose rights was said to be the aim of the "industrial party". He had been sentenced to ten years' forced labour, but had been released after less than a year and appointed to a higher post in the People's Commissariat. He was now required to confess that he had had too much timber felled, to ruin the forests of the Soviet Union and turn them into steppes. He told us that those who had confessed last time had mostly been sentenced to ten years' forced labour, but had been set free after a short time. Those who had refused to confess, however, had been sentenced to three years, but in many cases had never been seen again.

Another forester had had to confess that he had had special tracks cut in the forests on the Polish frontier, to open

the way for Polish or German tanks. We were told that a woman pottery specialist had designed a hexagonal ash-tray, thousands of which were produced for Soviet hostels and hotels, Intourist hotels in particular, where foreigners were accommodated. It was found that if this ash-tray were turned upside down and a pencil line were drawn connecting three of its legs, the result was a Zionist star. She was therefore accused of having designed this model to the order of "foreign Fascism". The unused stock of ash-trays, amounting to several thousands, was therefore destroyed. A Jewish engineer who had built a big scientific institute was accused of having designed it in the form of a half swastika (Г) in order to glorify Nazism.

(6) *Foreigners and "Foreign Agents"*

We now come to one of the biggest and most important categories of the Yezhov purge. Its "objective characteristic" was connection with a foreign country. Everyone who came into this category was accused of spying on behalf of a foreign Power, generally Germany, Japan or Poland, less frequently one of the other bordering States or Italy, in rare cases Turkey or "British Imperialism". People belonging to other categories were frequently accused of espionage too, but we are not concerned with them for the moment. During the Yezhov period the accusation of espionage was so universal that criminal prisoners in the labour camps referred to the political prisoners generally as spies or Trotskyists. The two epithets amounted to the same thing, as the Government claimed to have proved at the public trials in the autumn of 1936 that Trotskyists and German Fascists were closely associated and were working as allies for the purpose of overthrowing the Soviet power. The group under discussion is so wide that we propose to subdivide it further.

(*a*) *GENUINE FOREIGNERS*

Until the beginning of the thirties foreigners enjoyed high prestige in Russia. The Russian people, being cut off from foreign countries, developed a passionate interest in everything from abroad. At the time of the world economic

crisis unemployment drove many skilled workers, particularly Germans, to go to Russia, where they were given special consideration by the régime. During the 1932–33 famine, for instance, a special distributing agency supplied them with thoroughly adequate rations, far better than those enjoyed by the large majority of the native population. Many foreigners and their families were, however, grossly lacking in tact and adaptability, and by and large their conduct did nothing to make them popular. Most of them continually criticized and found fault with their surroundings, treated their Russian colleagues with unjustified arrogance, and often made demands far in excess of anything to which they had been accustomed at home.

It must be admitted that the general muddle and lack of organization lent some colour to their complaints. Engineers and workmen who had been told they would be able to start work immediately, and would be given decent accommodation, were kept hanging about in hotel bedrooms for months, often for years, and would get their pay without having to do a stroke for it. When they remonstrated they would be put off with the proverbial Russian assurance that everything would be all right tomorrow, and this contributed greatly to their demoralization and the behaviour described above.

This behaviour on the part of foreigners, particularly Germans, combined with their preferential treatment during the famine, gradually turned popular feeling against them, and when Stalin raised the espionage scare he gave this popular feeling an outlet.

Many foreigners, of course, had honestly tried to adapt themselves to the Soviet machine and had been notably successful in their work. The crowd of workers who streamed into Russia, chiefly during the years of the depression, fell broadly into two groups, though the dividing line between them was not always clear. The first consisted of unemployed, chiefly German unemployed, many of whom were not good workmen. In a period of unemployment the first to be sacked are naturally the inferior workers, and many of these were attracted to Russia by the prospect of security and good living conditions. It was generally these who

behaved in the way described above. Most of them went home in the years preceding 1936. Apart from these, however, there were large numbers of highly qualified workers, technicians, specialists and scientists who went to Russia with no motive but enthusiasm for the building up of Socialism. One must remember the attraction exercised during the economic crisis by a scientifically directed, Socialist, planned economy, in which there was no unemployment and which appeared to hold out prospects to scientists and engineers with which no other economic system could compete.

A large number of political refugees, generally but not invariably Communists, had also found asylum and work in the Soviet Union. Among them were naturally a number of adventurers with exciting pasts.

In Moscow there were also the members and staff of the Comintern and the numerous associated international organizations, such as the Trade Union International, the International Workers' Aid, the Red Aid, the Peasants' International, the Red Free Thinkers' Union, etc.

All these foreigners now came under suspicion of espionage.

The general trend of Soviet policy away from revolution and towards rearmament, imperialism, Russian nationalism and, above all, the increasing social stratification within the Soviet Union carried out under the slogan of "the struggle against egalitarianism", inevitably roused the bitter hostility of a large section of foreign Communists and other foreigners in sympathy with Communism or Socialism. The political refugees were, of course, all people "who had criticized their own Government and shown that they were capable of taking action against it". The general dissatisfaction was not altered by the fact that in the Comintern and the various national parties the orthodox party line was imposed nearly as thoroughly as in the Russian party itself.

An extremely violent change in the Comintern line took place just at this period. Before Hitler's seizure of power the Comintern had directed the main weight of its activities in all countries against the Social Democrats, whom it denounced as "Social Fascists". The German Communist

Party, on the explicit instructions of the executive committee of the Comintern and contrary to the original decision of the German party management, supported the Nazis in a referendum against the Social Democratic Government in Prussia. Dimitrov, as one of the "Rightists" in the Bulgarian party, was suspended and was about to be expelled when he was arrested after the Reichstag fire. Communist Party documents, circulating illegally in Germany, still maintained that Hitler's seizure of power was no defeat for the proletariat, and that the chief enemy remained Social Democracy.

A sharp turn to the "right" took place in Comintern policy simultaneously with the change in internal policy towards imperialism and nationalism. Dimitrov, who was acclaimed all over the world as the hero of the Reichstag fire trial, was made secretary-general of the Comintern. The Popular Front policy was announced in all countries, notably France, and alliance with the Social Democrats and even with the moderate bourgeois parties was advocated in words which a few months previously would have led to instant expulsion from any Communist party. But all the Communist parties were so thoroughly under Comintern control that no opposition worthy of the name occurred in any of them.

The original conception of the Comintern was that it was an organization superior to all the Communist parties, including the Russian. This was, of course, a fiction, and always had been a fiction, even in the twenties. During the Yezhov period the fiction was dropped, though the Comintern was not formally dissolved till 1943. But in 1937 it had already sunk to the level of a third-class organization, on a par, say, with the Moscow fire brigade. Curiously enough, this state of affairs was reached just at the moment when it was put into a magnificent new building, and its staff were moved from the Hotel Lux, in which they had lived a happy, rather Bohemian existence since the Comintern was founded, into some superb new flats. Dimitrov and the chief leaders of the individual parties were given smart cars.

The disappointment of the foreign specialists and the

disillusion of the political refugees and the employees of the Comintern meant that the foreigners in Russia formed a nucleus of discontent.

All political refugees were required formally to surrender their nationality and apply for Soviet citizenship. Before Soviet citizenship was granted, which generally took a very long time, those who had been guilty of political offences in their own country had to go to their consulates to have their passports extended. If this were refused, the man was immediately expelled or arrested. On the other hand foreigners on the political black-list in their own countries were as a rule disinclined to go anywhere near their own consulates, because a visit to them was regarded as a serious offence by the Soviet authorities, including the NKVD. Non-political specialists avoided their consulates for the same reason.

The position was not equally dangerous for all foreigners. The contracts of foreign specialists from the west European countries and the United States, and to begin with from Czechoslovakia, were simply not extended, and they were abruptly expelled, though in many cases they had applied for Soviet citizenship. The same occurred to a large number of German and Austrian specialists. The more opposed they were to Soviet ideology, the more likely they were to be merely expelled. Curiously enough, the closer one's ideology was to that of the Soviet Union the greater danger one was in. This was a trait very characteristic of the régime. It seemed deeply to distrust any loyalty based on political conviction and much preferred to rely on bonds of material interest. A foreign specialist who insisted that his contract should provide for the payment of a big sum in foreign currency and then piled demand on demand was in virtually no danger. At worst he would be expelled. Similarly the older generation of Russian scientists and scholars, who were completely out of sympathy with the régime, were in far less danger than those who had feelings of loyalty towards it. All idealism was suspect.

"Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much; such men are dangerous."

Germans, Austrians, Poles, and to a lesser extent Italians, were in the greatest danger. One German refugee specialist, who had been working very successfully in the Soviet Union for a long time, was able to leave the country unhindered because he possessed a British passport, though according to documents in the NKVD files he was one of the most important figures in the German espionage system.

Whole blocks of houses inhabited by foreigners were emptied. In Moscow, for instance, there was a block of flats which had been built on a co-operative basis and paid for in foreign currency brought in by foreign specialists for the purpose of obtaining accommodation quickly. Not a single flat escaped from the arrests, and most of them changed hands several times.

Foreigners were to be found everywhere in the cells. One of them was the young Baroncini, a leading figure in the Italian Communist Youth Movement, who with refreshing cheerfulness organized Christmas celebrations in a Moscow prison-cell intended for twenty-four men and occupied by 150. Another was the famous Hugo Eberlein, a friend of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the first German to enter the Soviet Union at the head of a workers' delegation, who had recently been a member of the central control commission, one of the highest departments of the Comintern, and leader of the German Communists in the Prussian Landtag. A few days before his arrest a news item appeared in a Swiss Socialist newspaper announcing his arrest. A Press conference was therefore held in Moscow at which he laughingly described the lies and fairy-tales circulated by the foreign Press. He was arrested next day.

He had interesting experiences to relate. During his first stay in the Kremlin, after returning from an exciting discussion, he had had to wait in an unheated room for three-quarters of an hour; Lenin had then come shuffling down the long corridor, given him a pound of sugar as a present and apologized for having taken so long to get hold of it. In the old days, when there had still been factions in the Comintern, he had counted as a "rightist", but had remained loyal to the "line" right to the end. His descriptions of French prisons,

the acquaintance of which he had made as an alleged financial courier of the Comintern after 1933, were positively idyllic. An engraver by trade, in his youth he had wandered through Italy on foot with a copy of Goethe's *Italian Journey* in his pocket, following Goethe's route. He had been a trade unionist and Social Democrat since before the first world war, had been a Spartacist,[1] and was one of the most impressive figures in the German working-class movement. He had suffered since youth from severe asthma, and he was subjected to interrogation of the most brutal kind while severe attacks were in progress. This happened in the Lefortovo military prison. He was sentenced to twenty-five years' forced labour.

A big group consisted of members of the Austrian Schutzbund, who fled to Czechoslovakia after the events in Vienna in February, 1934, and ultimately found their way to the Soviet Union. They had been ceremoniously received in the country of the workers, and had settled in all parts of the Soviet Union. Now they were all regarded as Fascist spies and were arrested almost without exception.

At the time of the Spanish civil war many political *émigrés* all over the world volunteered for the International Brigade in defence of the Spanish Republic. Big maps showing the Spanish front were displayed in all Russian towns. Collections on behalf of Republican Spain were made in all factories and institutions. After Franco's victory many who had fought for the Republic came to the Soviet Union, where they suddenly became suspect foreigners. Soon many of them appeared in the NKVD cells, accused of having been won over to Fascism by Franco. Spanish was added to the many languages to be heard in the cells. We remember in particular a Czech worker who had returned to Czechoslovakia after fighting in the Spanish civil war and had fled to Russia after its occupation by the Germans. His arrest was a shattering blow, which he could never understand.

[1] *I.e.*, a member of the group of left-wing Social Democrats, or Communists, which attempted risings in Germany after the end of the first world war. These were savagely repressed by the right-wing Social Democrats who were then in power. The group took its name from the leader of a slave rebellion against the Romans.

The German occupation of Czechoslavakia had remarkable consequences. Czechs suddenly became suspect foreigners and were treated as German agents. One of us shared a cell with a Czech confectioner who had remained in Russia after the 1914–18 war and had never been home since. On the day after the occupation of Czechoslavakia he was arrested as a German agent. One could hardly fail to admire the German intelligence service, which had apparently had the foresight, before the State of Czechoslovakia came into existence, to recruit a future national of that State to spy against the Soviet Union, which also did not yet exist, in case the still non-existent State of Czechoslovakia should one day be overrun by the Germans. That, however, was what he was expected to confess.

It did not help German Jews to point out the improbability of their feeling any sympathy for Nazi Germany. "The Jewish refugees are Hitler's agents abroad," an examining magistrate once declared.

Nearly all the ordinary skilled foreign workers also fell victims to the purge. Rarely there existed some "objective circumstance" on which an accusation could be based. The German worker Johann G., for instance, was living with his wife, a baby, his mother-in-law and sister-in-law in a single small room with a leaking ceiling. He went from office to office, complaining and appealing for the better accommodation he had been promised. Once he exclaimed in exasperation that in capitalist countries even dogs were better off than workers in Russia. This unfortunate remark did not, however, form the basis of the charge against him; he was accused of being an international spy, because he had travelled in many European countries in his youth.

Now and then one met foreigners in the cells who had been quite accidentally caught in the net. One such was a Viennese café proprietor, who had invented a new kind of coffee-machine. He had been told by his left-wing customers in Vienna that there would be a big market for it in the Soviet Union, and he had come to Moscow as a tourist to offer it to various People's Commissariats. He was entirely unable to understand what had happened to him.

There were practically no Japanese in the Soviet Union,

but many Chinese. China at the time was at war with Japan. During the war the Tsarist Government had recruited some two million Chinese workers for timber work in Russia, and after the collapse they poured out of their camps and spread all over the country. The majority eventually found their way back to their native country. But a great many enlisted in the Red Army, and the Chinese, like the Latvians, provided some of the most formidable units in the civil war. A large number, said to have been about 100,000, settled permanently in Russia and, thanks to their skill and adaptability, were to be found in all sorts of civilian occupations. Many became laundrymen, and most had married Russian girls. By virtue of a remarkable logical process, which they were utterly unable to understand, they were now arrested, practically without exception, as Japanese spies. They were also required to confess to things other than espionage. One shy little Chinese, named Ti Ma-sha, asked what he was accused of, answered: "Tellol." He meant "terror", which was supposed to have consisted of an intention to assassinate members of the Soviet Government. He was said to have been induced to undertake this by the Japanese espionage service before leaving Sinkiang, the most westerly province of China, for neighbouring Uzbekistan. He was alleged to have taken a job as tram-driver in Kharkov with this end in view; his plan was said to have been to crash into any motor-car on the tracks in front of him which was carrying members of the Soviet Government.

Citizens of nearly every nation in the world were to be found in Russian prisons, and among them were the most varied types and characters, ranging from men of the most admirable strength, integrity and humanity down to those whose experiences had reduced them to a state in which they seemed to have lost practically all human characteristics. In our experience, the proportion of the various types was much the same in all nationalities. The only exception were the Chinese. Most of them came from the most uneducated classes—among them were men who admitted to having been bandits—but their moral and physical discipline was without exception admirable. They kept themselves beautifully clean, and managed to do their washing

with the most primitive means imaginable. Every Chinese always had a carefully folded bundle of snow-white linen, which he managed to iron with a tea kettle. They were the only people who, though just as hungry as the rest, used to exchange bread for soap. The generosity and fairness with which they shared out the gifts they occasionally received from their families was as admirable as the spirit with which they endured privation.

Another nationality which fell victim to the spy-hunt were the so-called Assyrians. Numerically they were not a large group, but they were scattered all over Russia. Everyone knew that they, and the Armenians, provided the boot-blacks who shined shoes with great aplomb all over Russia on public pitches in the street. Until 1914 they lived in a very patriarchal manner as a small pastoral tribe near the junction of the Russian, Turkish and Persian frontiers on Lake Urmia. They were Nestorian Christians and politically subject to the hereditary patriarch who was their spiritual leader. Shortly before the 1914 war their church was solemnly absorbed by the Russian Orthodox Church, and the tribe came under the protection of the Tsar. When war broke out they were settled inside Russia in the Kuban district, and from there they spread all over the country.

Now they had become either Turkish spies or agents of British imperialism. We came across cases in which the sabotage to which they confessed consisted of having cleaned shoes with bad polish, to make them brittle and inspire popular dissatisfaction with the quality of Soviet-made shoes. An elderly Assyrian who had confessed to this denied with great heat and indignation a joking suggestion made in the cell that perhaps he had cleaned brown shoes with black polish or *vice-versa*. One Assyrian who remained at liberty was an old man, reputed to be 150 years old, a well-known figure on the streets of Kiev, whose pitch was in the immediate neighbourhood of the NKVD building. He was the head of a family all the male members of which had been arrested. But there he reigned, with his imposing beard, among a crowd of small boys who, out of respect for his white hair, relieved him of the work of shoe cleaning and left him to collect the money.

Arrested foreigners who had not been granted Soviet nationality could at least hope to be expelled, and in the years before 1936 this was the general rule. We do not know what happened during the Yezhov period to the arrested Chinese, Poles and Rumanians, but we do know some of the things that happened to the Germans. Immediately before the outbreak of war, when the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed, a secret agreement seems to have been reached that all arrested Germans, whether refugees, specialists or ordinary workers, should be deported to Germany. In any case the facts are that between September, 1939, and the spring of 1940 all Germans in prisons and concentration camps were taken to Moscow and concentrated in certain cells of the Butyrka prison. This took place independently of whether they had been convicted or not or whether they were refugees or specialists. Among them were many who had assumed Soviet citizenship, as well as some who had been deprived of German nationality, as officially announced in the German *Reichsanzeiger*. Incidentally the Germans were magnificently treated in these "transit" cells. For several months before their expulsion they were given special rations and daily cigarettes.

A large proportion of these Germans, in many cases in spite of their written or verbal protests, were handed over to the Gestapo at the Polish demarcation line. They included many Jewish and other anti-Nazi refugees, who were immediately put in German prisons and concentration camps, and many died at Auschwitz. Many, particularly those who knew a great deal about conditions in Russia after spending a long time in prisons or concentration camps, had to make written statements that they would work abroad for the NKVD and maintain complete silence about all their experiences at the hands of the NKVD.

A promise of silence was incidentally required of everybody released by the NKVD. This reminds us of what seems to be a peculiarity of the Russian character. If it is true that elephants never forget, Russians seem to us to be the very opposite of elephants. It is not just threats and intimidation which keep a man quiet when released after years of innocent suffering; Soviet Russian psychology seems

to make such forgetfulness really possible. Many officers and technicians who had been in prisons and concentration camps, and must have obtained a thorough insight into the workings of the NKVD, gave their utmost for the Soviet Union during the war. Several of the most celebrated men of learning in the Soviet Union at the present day are known to us as having been in prison.

(*b*) *"FOREIGN AGENTS"*

The category of those who were arrested as spies because of their connection with foreign countries was far more comprehensive than that of the real foreigners.

(i) *Native "foreigners"*

The first group in this category consisted of those born abroad. This included those born in Tsarist provinces which ceased to be Russian after the first world war, *i.e.*, Poland, Finland and the Baltic States, and it applied to those of Russian nationality even if their parents had been employed in those provinces as Russian officials. Many could not speak a word of the language of the country as citizens of which they had been arrested, and among them were men whose families had been domiciled in Russia for generations and whose only connection with a foreign country was the possession of a Polish- or Latvian-sounding surname.

The many Latvians in Russia deserve special mention in this respect. They came to Central Russia, partly as a result of the removal of big industrial works from Riga during the first world war, when the key staffs were moved to Kharkov and other towns, and partly as a result of the Red Army's withdrawal from Latvia in 1920. Among the latter were large numbers of "Old Guard" Communists, many of them in leading positions. Latvian troops played a rôle in the civil war similar to or greater than that of the Chinese. Whether because of a special aptitude for secret party work or because of special schooling in it, a large number of leading positions in the Soviet secret services, both at home and abroad, were known to be occupied by Latvians, both in the NKVD secret service and in the Red Army military intelligence

service, as well as in the corresponding service of the Comintern. Many Latvians had held leading positions in the old Cheka. Now they were all accused of being members of a Trotskyist or Latvian nationalist organization.

A Latvian fitter from the Kharkov locomotive factory, a former worker for the Cheka, confessed that, by order of the Latvian secret service, which had ramifications in the highest ranks of the Red Army, he had worked for a Greater Latvia, which was to include a large part of European Russia, including Moscow, and have Vilna as its capital.

(ii) *Soviet citizens who had been abroad*

Another group in this category consisted of Russians who had been abroad. These were in particular danger. A great many were scientists, for between 1925 and 1929 many scientists and engineers went abroad on behalf of Soviet institutions to work in corresponding institutions in Germany, England, Holland and the United States, to renew scientific relations abroad or start new ones. It was these who were in the gravest danger. But scholars who had worked abroad before the first world war, engineers, members of Soviet purchasing and selling missions also fell into this category.

In a "big cell" in a Moscow prison one of us heard a lecture by an important Soviet engineer who had just come back from America, where he had signed contracts for the construction of a rolling-mill at Zaporozhe to the value of many millions of dollars. He explained that this lecture on his mission and the state of engineering abroad should really have been delivered that very same day to the appropriate People's Commissar; instead the "big cell" had the opportunity of hearing it.

All those who had ever been on the staff of any of the Soviet trade delegations in Berlin or Paris, of Arcos in London or Amtorg in the United States, now found their way, almost without exception, to the cells of the NKVD. A certain amount of information about the fate which awaited Soviet employees abroad naturally trickled through to foreign countries, and this was one of the reasons why many Soviet citizens failed to return.

Some of those in prison had succeeded in earning huge

profits for the Soviet Union. One convinced Communist, who had worked in the Soviet trade organization in America, explained in great detail how he had once made a profit of several million dollars for his country in a few days by skilful manipulation of the Chicago wheat market. But such services could not wipe out the stain involved by even a short stay abroad.

The staff of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic and consular service were also represented in the prisons in considerable numbers. It is worth noting in this connection that the diplomatic service consisted almost entirely of members of the NKVD. Membership of the Soviet foreign service was only nominal. In reality it was NKVD-controlled. Members of the foreign service were incriminated on two grounds; first as members of the NKVD and second as people who had been abroad.

Many members of the Soviet merchant marine were also to be found in the cells.

(iii) *Those having cultural relations with foreign countries*

For a long time there had existed in the Soviet Union an organization known as Voks, the Society for Cultural Relations Abroad. Among its tasks were the organization of visits by foreign scholars and artists, propaganda abroad for Soviet cultural progress and achievements, the circulation of foreign journals in Russia, the organization of international congresses and conferences and the arrangements for Soviet representation at such conferences abroad. It worked hand-in-glove with organizations called Friends of the Soviet Union, which existed in most foreign countries, and consisted, as in England, for instance, largely of intellectuals interested in the building of Socialism in the Soviet Union. Several periodicals were printed in English and French in Moscow in the service of this skilfully directed propaganda. There had also been a German periodical, the *Moskauer Rundschau*, but its whole staff was soon arrested for espionage, and one editor followed another in rapid succession until it was finally closed down.

In the eyes of the NKVD the whole Voks organization had turned out to be nothing but a vast espionage

network, and its staff, having been seduced by the German, Polish, Rumanian or Japanese espionage services, were arrested practically without exception. Heads of Voks, which incidentally still exists today, followed one another in rapid succession. The fate of Voks was shared by Intourist. Intourist had travel bureaux in all large cities abroad and ran hotels and hostels for foreign tourists in nearly every city in the Soviet Union. Since all Intourist travel was paid for in foreign currency, the organization was a not unimportant asset in the Soviet balance of payments. But it too turned out to be nothing but an espionage network, and nearly all its staff ended up in prison, including even the little lady interpreters whose task was to show travellers the sights of Soviet cities.

The danger inherent in any contact with foreigners, of which every Soviet citizen was aware, was the cause of often tragic dilemmas for Soviet scientists.

The vast majority—the younger generation as well as the older—felt themselves members of a great international community bound together by common work on common problems. Russians are also among the most hospitable people in the world, and Russian scientists felt a strong urge to make the most of every opportunity of establishing contact with their foreign colleagues. Every opportunity of travelling or being stationed abroad was extremely tempting to them—and not only because of the material advantages involved. On the other hand the more cautious among them avoided foreigners like the plague. The more tense the political situation grew, the more necessary this became. Only the desire not to seem impolite or inhospitable made many, particularly of the older generation, depart from what became an almost instinctive reluctance to have anything to do with foreigners.

In 1936 an eclipse of the sun took place, and the totality zone was in Siberia. Several foreign observatories sent expeditions to Central Asia, and these were given every assistance by the Soviet authorities. Observation posts were erected at Akbulak, for instance, and the results were very successful, but the issues of American scientific journals in which they were reported were not to be found in Soviet libraries. In

these issues their American colleagues expressed their thanks to several leading Soviet astronomers who had been their hosts. They were therefore withheld by the censorship, for the Soviet astronomers concerned had in the meantime been arrested as spies, among them the leading astronomer Gerasimovich.

Several international congresses of physiologists and geologists which took place in those critical years also had devastating consequences for many of the Soviet participants. The danger involved by scientific contact with foreign colleagues varied with every alteration in the party line and with every alteration in Soviet foreign policy. Connections with British scientists, for instance, might at a given moment be relatively safe and enjoy the support of the highest Soviet authorities. But a tiny cloud on the horizon of relations with that country, unsuccessful trade negotiations, for example, or a sharp article in a Soviet newspaper would be sufficient to make such connections extremely dangerous. After the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 relations with German scientists, which had been completely dropped, were suddenly resumed.

In some cases, such as that of Professor Belts, the famous surgeon, where members of racial minorities were concerned —Professor Belts came of a Mennonite settler's family—the fact of having taken part in international congresses even before the first world war was evidence of "having been recruited for the German espionage service", as he himself later confessed.

(iv) *Those who had engaged in correspondence with foreign countries*

All correspondence with foreign countries was regarded as incriminating, not only by the NKVD but by the Soviet public, as expressed at the "criticism and self-criticism" meetings. Many people, particularly those who had relatives abroad, often conducted such correspondence for years, though always very discreetly. In the years 1929–35 such correspondence was very popular, for goods of Soviet manufacture, such as provisions, clothes and other necessities, could be bought at world prices in any quantity in exchange for foreign currency at the special so-called

Torgsin shops. During the famine many families kept themselves alive on the occasional few dollars or pounds they received from relatives abroad, and this naturally encouraged them to keep the correspondence alive. Now, however, most of them had to suffer for it, for they were arrested as spies.

Scientists also conducted an extensive correspondence with their colleagues in foreign countries, and many Russian scientists, particularly those engaged in the natural sciences, published their findings in foreign journals, especially in Germany, and later in Britain and America as well.

Lastly there was a special organization which promoted correspondence with "Friends of the Soviet Union" abroad in order to encourage the study of foreign languages, and circulated addresses for this purpose. This movement received every official encouragement. We remember a young science student named Gershuns, who was a member of the Communist Youth Organization. He had a good knowledge of modern foreign literature and an extraordinary gift for languages. His English was excellent. The organization put him in touch with a Communist worker in Manchester, with whom he exchanged letters extolling the triumphs of Socialism on the one hand and the wretchedness of capitalist countries on the other. These letters naturally passed the Soviet censorship. Gershuns had never been abroad, but the result of the correspondence was that he was sent to prison as a German spy. When he said goodbye to one of us he asked that his correspondent might be informed of his fate. We mention this in the hope that we may thereby be carrying out his request.

(v) *Those who had had dealings with foreigners*

The large number of foreigners living in the Soviet Union, and the presence of foreign consulates and diplomatic representatives, resulted in a large number of people having dealings with foreigners. A doctor, who had several times been called by the German consul in Kharkov to attend a member of his staff, at first cautiously refrained and referred the consul to the foreign department of the NKVD. He was, however, ordered by the latter to go to the consulate and treat the patient. This had no unfortunate consequences immediately, but two years later he was arrested for espionage and accused of having been recruited for the German intelligence service on the occasion of these professional visits. The same fate befell a seventy-year-old veterinary surgeon at Kiev, who treated the German consul's dog, also on the instructions of the NKVD. A man who had once chopped wood in the Polish consul's backyard and a woman who had sold eggs to the consulate were also arrested. This German consul, desiring to play tennis, was officially provided with a partner by the Soviet authorities—a young lawyer who happened to be a good player. He too was sent to prison—we met him there—though his contacts with the consul had been confined to playing tennis with him. Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely. Relatives of these people were also arrested, *e.g.*, the son of the above-mentioned veterinary surgeon and an old caretaker who, when asked why he was in prison, always explained that he was the brother of the woman who supplied the German consul's milk.

The closing of several foreign consulates in Russian provincial cities was therefore generally welcomed.

(vi) *Ex-prisoners of war*

In the first world war the Germans and Austrians took more than a million Russian prisoners. As these unfortunates "had been abroad", they might well, according to the logic applied in such cases, have been enlisted in the German intelligence service, and they thus became a category worthy of arrest. In 1938 people, workers and simple kolkhoz peasants, started appearing in the cells, all utterly unable to imagine why they had been arrested. It turned out that they had been prisoners of war. Men who had been taken prisoner by the Poles in the Soviet-Polish war of 1920 also started appearing. In the case of the latter it was just conceivable that some of them might have been asked to spy against the Soviet Union, as in 1920 the Soviet Union at least existed. The only thing that could have been held against those who had been in Germany and Austria was that Ukrainian prisoners had been concentrated in special

camps, in which separatist and nationalist propaganda was vigorously carried on. This might be said to lend some justification to an NKVD search for potential enemies among those who had been in such camps. The arrests were not, however, confined to Ukrainians. But we had the impression that arrests of ex-prisoners were far less sweeping than in the previously mentioned groups. The likelihood of any individual being arrested was definitely not so high.

On the other hand former German, Polish and Austrian prisoners of war, who had remained in Russia after the war and had mostly married Russian women, were arrested as spies, almost without exception. The same applied to the Czechs, of whom there were a considerable number. The Czechs were arrested after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, at a time when the purge had started dying away.

(vii) *Foreign settlers*

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, after the conquest of South Russia, many foreigners, driven from home by religious persecution or economic distress, came and settled in the country as a result of generous offers by the Russian Government. Up to the Yezhov period a large number of German villages and communities were to be found scattered all over Russia. The inhabitants had preserved their German mother-tongue unchanged since the time of Catherine the Great, and still spoke the dialects of the parts of Germany from which they sprang. Thus some spoke Swabian, and others the purest Saxon or East Prussian. This last was mostly spoken by the Mennonites, who had had no religious freedom in their native land. In Russia these settlers were popular. In agriculture and living conditions generally they were far in advance of the peasants around them, and they taught them much about the cultivation of the soil. No national antipathy existed between them and their Russian neighbours. In the course of the centuries many of these families had achieved a relatively high degree of prosperity, and would have been counted as prosperous peasants even in western Europe. Such families had frequently sent their sons to the university, and it was not

uncommon to find descendants of these people in the learned professions. As they were Russian nationals, they were left unmolested in the first world war.

At the time of collectivization, however, many of them came within the definition of kulak, and many, particularly of the wealthier ones, were deported to Siberia, sometimes with their families. Others tried to emigrate to Germany, and some succeeded. But the majority remained where they were. The population of the only compact German-settled area within the Soviet Union, the former Volga German Republic, suffered the same fate as the isolated villages. In 1936 the Government began the systematic liquidation of all German settlements. This time, however, the simple method of deportation was not chosen. Nearly all adult male inhabitants of the villages, which in the meantime had been organized into kolkhozes, were suddenly arrested and accused of counter-revolutionary activity and espionage on behalf of Germany.

At that time there were cells the inmates of which spoke nothing but Swabian or East Prussian, being all members of the same collective farm. Often a father and several sons, of whom the youngest might be about fourteen, were to be found in the same cell. This was an exception to the rule that members of a family must be separated in prison. The remainder of the family would be deported to remote areas of Siberia and Central Asia, leaving the greater part of its possessions behind.

Nearly every Polish, Ukrainian or White Russian family living near the Polish border suffered the same fate. This practice of compulsory mass deportation of self-contained population groups, which had been carried out in antiquity by the Assyrians and the New Babylonian Empire (the Babylonian captivity of the Jews), was unknown in later antiquity and in the whole of mediaeval and modern history. It was left to the Soviet Union to revive it in our own times in its dealings with the people on its own western frontier and on the Korean border in the Far East. It took place at roughly the same time as the mass deportation of the South Tyrolese by agreement between Hitler and Mussolini.

About three-quarters of a million Koreans had been

living on the Korean border. Many of them had sought refuge in Russia from the hated rule of the Japanese. They were arrested, accused of spying on behalf of Japan, and their families deported to Tajikstan, to a climate to which they were entirely unaccustomed. Nearly all individual Koreans living in the Soviet Union were arrested as Japanese spies at the same time. The process was continued during and after the war by the official liquidation of the autonomous German Volga Republic, the Crimean-Tartar Republic, the autonomous districts of Ingushetia and Chechen, the autonomous Kalmuk district in Northern Caucasia and the mass deportation of their populations.

Many Bulgarians, most of them engaged in market-gardening in the neighbourhood of the towns, were also arrested as spies. But confession to espionage on behalf of Bulgaria was only accepted in exceptional cases. They had to confess to being Rumanian or German spies.

On December 17th, 1937, a Greek pedlar appeared in the cell in which one of us was confined in Moscow. He had been earning his living for thirty years selling waffles and burnt almonds in the Zoological Gardens. It later turned out that the process of arresting practically every Greek in the Soviet Union not resident in a Greek community had started on that day. There were many such Greeks, and all of them were now guilty of espionage.

There was a district almost entirely inhabited by Greeks near Mariupol, on the Black Sea. These were the descendants of Greeks who had started settling there in the time of Catherine the Great; most of them came during the nineteenth-century Greek wars of independence. They had enjoyed national autonomy under the Soviet Government until the Yezhov period, but were now suddenly regarded as a grave national danger. We happen to be very well informed about these Greeks, because one of us shared a cell with the man who, according to his own confession, was to have become Minister of Education in the proposed Greater Greek Republic, which was to have been founded with foreign, and in particular Greek, assistance in South Russia. Its capital was to have been Mariupol, and it was to have included Kharkov and, according to other versions of the

story, Kiev. This man, whose name was Vadimov, was Professor of Ancient Greek at Kharkov University, a native Russian, who had spent a year studying archaeology in Athens as the guest of Athens University. We also made the fleeting acquaintance of the Prime Minister-designate of the same republic, a leading Communist of Greek nationality, who was adviser on national minority questions to the central committee of the Ukraine party. Another unassuming little Greek, Dr. Alexandropoulos, of Salonika, was the man who had communicated to the Greek secret service the name and characteristics of the species of tiny fish which was being used in swampy areas for the extermination of malarial mosquitoes. This too was regarded as an acceptable confession.

(viii) "*Frontier-jumpers*"

A category guilty of a real offence was that of the "frontier-jumpers", to be found in the prisons near the western frontier. They were for the most part deserters from the Polish or Rumanian armies, young adventurers, or men who had been attracted by Soviet propaganda and had crossed the frontier illegally in the hope of finding work or, perhaps, the opportunity of getting higher education. We also met one man who had fled from Rumania to escape having to pay alimony. All these people were accused, not of having illegally crossed the frontier, but of espionage, and they confessed to the most extraordinary things.

There were often real spies among them.

(ix) *Real spies*

On one occasion all the warders in a Kiev prison dashed excitedly to a cell where a newly-arrived prisoner was kept in solitary confinement. Afterwards they told the other prisoners with immense pride and satisfaction that they had actually seen a real spy. Real spies seem generally to have been kept in isolation, and we were told later by arrested NKVD officials that after conviction they were generally enrolled in the NKVD espionage service. The head of the espionage service of one of the great Powers incidentally mentioned in a book published after the first world war that

no circumstances were so favourable for the work of the real, professional spy as the spy scares which broke out in so many European countries at the outbreak of war. It was clear from what we were told by arrested examining magistrates that only an infinitesimal proportion of the espionage cases were real.

The Soviet definition of espionage is entirely different from that prevailing elsewhere. Espionage normally means the unauthorized communication of State secrets to a State's actual or potential enemies, but in the Soviet Union it may consist of the dissemination of any not specifically published fact. There are differences between economic, political and military espionage. Communication to foreigners of information about the price of goods, statements about their quality, or information whether or where they are obtainable amount to economic espionage. Political espionage covers, among other things, statements about personal relations between individuals in the Soviet State organization and party, and in particular statements mentioning such an individual's alleged political leanings or alleged political dissatisfaction. The numerous and often successful attempts to make statements about the political attitude of individuals the basis of a confession of espionage derived from this. Only military espionage is defined more or less as it is in other countries.

A former examining magistrate who shared a cell with one of us explained that the communication to a foreigner of, say, the street plan of a provincial town or the name of the man in control of a collectivized economic unit would enable a foreign espionage service to give detailed instructions to an agent who was to be sent to such a town, or help it to make out a false passport for him. This conception of espionage seems, therefore, less a specifically Soviet Russian peculiarity than a consequence of the ability of a completely totalitarian State to withhold information from foreigners in a way which would be unthinkable in a non-totalitarian State.

In the vast majority of cases, however, the NKVD examining magistrates were not to be put off with confessions of minor acts of "espionage" of the kind described above, of which practically everyone was guilty every day.

They generally required something much more definite, and interrogation was continued until the victim confessed to some act of positive espionage, and great powers of persuasion on the part of the accused were often required to convince the examining magistrate of the seriousness and importance of a fictitious espionage "legend", and to get him to accept it.

(7) *Members of National Minorities*

The October Revolution formally gave complete national independence to all racial minorities in the Soviet Union, "including the right of voluntary and complete secession from the Soviet Union", in Lenin's own words. It is a historical curiosity that Stalin's first position in the Soviet Government was that of People's Commissar for Nationalities, and that it was thus his duty to carry out this policy. It was the subject of several of his early speeches and articles, to be found in his *Problems of Leninism*. Even in the early stages of Soviet history, at the time of the sovietization of the Ukraine and Georgia, the right to secession was never, of course, taken seriously.

The years up to 1937 brought the national minorities a considerable degree of cultural freedom, though in the Ukraine, for example, policy alternated between the two extremes of complete "Ukrainization" and decentralization on the one hand and Russian centralization on the other. At the end of the twenties, for instance, all lectures in Ukrainian universities were ordered to be given in Ukrainian, which meant that many teachers and students had to devote much time and trouble to learning the language. For many subjects a special Ukrainian terminology had to be invented. The suicide of Skrypnik, the Ukrainian People's Commissar for Education, put an end to this state of affairs, which was followed by a purge directed to the suppression of alleged Ukrainian nationalism.

Overriding this alternation between centralization and decentralization in cultural and linguistic matters, however, was the steady drive towards complete centralization in political and, above all, economic matters, which ended in decisions being made exclusively in Moscow.

With the beginning of the Yezhov era, the course steered was more and more in the direction of a Russian national State. This was reflected in the closing down of many Ukrainian newspapers and a substantial reduction in the number of national minorities' schools and theatres. The period of complete linguistic freedom had incidentally been characterized by an obviously spontaneous drop in the number of pupils in the schools of the national minorities. This was particularly noticeable in the Yiddish schools. When there was complete linguistic freedom, and a complete absence of State pressure directed against the national minority's survival, with the result that a minority's national language and culture were not things to be defended in the name of that minority's national honour, a spontaneous tendency to assimilation asserted itself.

The new centralization, however, automatically revived resistance to assimilation, and we believe that it was only in that sense that there could be any talk of genuine discontent on the part of the national minorities at that time. Nevertheless widespread "national conspiracies" appeared in the NKVD files, linked with the names of former supporters of nationalist parties, and a wave of extorted denunciations accordingly led to innumerable arrests. Nearly all the members of some national minorities living outside areas where they formed the mass of the population were arrested. In Georgia and Armenia only the most important party and State officials and a large number of teachers, engineers, etc., were arrested and accused of nationalism, but in the Ukraine, for instance, every Armenian was arrested, almost without exception, even if he were as low down the ladder as a manager of a State shop or a bootblack. The Armenians were particularly unlucky, for they were nearly all refugees who had sought refuge in Russia from the Turkish massacres. Many had come to Russia after emigrating to America or France.

The "Jewish nationalists" were a rather special case. Jewish nationalism, in the sense of Zionism, had long been condemned in the Soviet Union, and it was dangerous to have belonged to the Zionist movement or to have relatives

who had emigrated to Palestine. As a counter-attraction to a Jewish national State in Palestine, the Soviet Union had set up the autonomous Jewish national settlement of Birobidjan in the Far East, and had conducted vigorous propaganda among Jews abroad who sympathized with the Soviet Union, to persuade them to settle there. When the persecution of Jews began in Nazi Germany, many Jewish refugees naturally looked hopefully in that direction, but only a relatively small number ever succeeded in obtaining entry permits.

American Jews, associating themselves ideologically with an earlier stage of Soviet development, actually came to settle in Birobidjan, bringing their own tractors and modern equipment and intending to establish agricultural communities and live on a Communist basis. We do not know what happened to them, but we know that Professor Lieberberg, who became president of this autonomous district—he had been director of the Institute of Jewish Culture (since closed down)—was arrested, together with all its other leaders. By all accounts scarcely anything remains of the Jewish national home in Birobidjan. Propaganda has been silent about it for years.

There was no anti-Semitism in the sense that Jewish origin put anyone in a category in itself leading to arrest. The opposite idea, spread by the Nazis, that the NKVD was controlled by Jews and that Jews enjoyed a preferential position in the Soviet Union, was also completely false. If there was any substance in the talk of anti-Semitism in Russia, it lay rather in the fact that Jews were gradually and quietly removed from the higher posts in the party and the Government, and that Jewish NKVD officials, or Jews in any way connected with the armed forces, seemed rather more likely to be arrested than their non-Jewish opposite numbers. During the Yezhov period people used to say: "He's not a party member and he's not a Jew, so why has he been arrested?"

(8) *The "Has-Beens"*

A significant part in Soviet terminology was played by the "has-beens". The phrase covered everybody who had

been of any importance before the Revolution, whether by reason of property, position, rank or title. Membership of this category had been incriminating through the Soviet period. Everyone in the Soviet Union had continually to be filling in questionnaires, and these invariably contained questions about social origin and "class". The latter referred to the classes existing before the Revolution, *e.g.*, the nobility, priesthood, petty bourgeoisie, the commercial class, or the peasantry. Questions were also asked about one's pre-revolutionary occupation and former party membership. The charge of "concealment of social extraction" was one of the most serious which could be laid against a Soviet citizen.

Many or most of the more prominent among the "has-beens" had been in a Soviet prison at one time or another. But in 1937 there were still a surprising number of former nobles and merchants who kept body and soul together by working as book-keepers, night-watchmen, etc. "Class vigilance" now required their removal from even the humblest jobs, and most of them, after losing their jobs and a long and hopeless search for some hole in which to hide their heads, found their way to prison. Those who had been in prison before, whether they had been pardoned or released after serving their term, were certain to be locked up again. Most of these "has-beens" were former officers, officials, landowners, as well as wealthy merchants and industrialists of the Tsarist era.

A typical example of these was the seventy-six-year-old General Sorokin, who had returned to Russia from Paris on the strength of a promise of a complete amnesty. For a time he had worked as an instructor in a Red Army military school, but was dismissed and found a job as a night-watchman. He was eventually arrested. He had confessed to taking part in the preparation of an armed rebellion. Men with similar experiences were to be found in nearly every cell. They and their stories belonged to the past.

A special place among these people was occupied by priests of every denomination; Roman Catholic and Orthodox priests were to be met with everywhere, cheek by jowl with Protestant pastors and Jewish rabbis.

In spite of all statements to the contrary, it is quite definitely a fact that at no time in Soviet history have priests been persecuted or arrested solely as priests. Earlier they had generally been accused of counter-revolutionary agitation, but now they were accused of espionage and plotting against the Soviet power. Most churches were closed at this time, or were used for non-ecclesiastical purposes. Public religious observance was possible only on the most restricted scale. All church activity was subject to the complete control of the NKVD.

Besides members of the pre-Revolutionary ruling class and their officials, the "has-beens" included all who had opposed the Bolsheviks in the civil war. Among them were those who had supported the Petliura[1] Government, the Anarchist Makhno in the Ukraine, the counter-revolutionary Generals Kolchak and Denikin, the Menshevik Government which remained in power in Georgia until 1920, the "Cadets" (Constitutional Democrats) and the Social Revolutionaries (whose left wing formed a coalition with the Bolsheviks in the days immediately after the October Revolution).

Two typical figures belonging to this group are worth recalling. Both had been supporters of the anarchist Makhno. The first, Suichenko, had been head of the interrogation commission of the Makhno Government. He had spent twenty-six of his fifty years in Tsarist and Soviet prisons. He was of working-class origin and had twice been condemned to forced labour under the Soviet régime. After serving his term he had found work as a moulder in a foundry, on the condition that he renounced all political activity. All his crimes had been pardoned or expiated, but in order not to attract attention he had joined the Osoaviakhim, an organization for defence against aerial and chemical warfare which had for years been supported by the party. It was somewhat analogous to the civilian air-raid precautions organizations in other countries.

Membership of this body, as was the case with so many

[1] Petliura made several attempts to form a so-called independent democratic republic in the Ukraine. He was finally defeated by the Bolsheviks in 1920 and was murdered in Paris in 1926.

official Soviet bodies, was almost an incriminating circumstance in itself. The arrest and confessions of its leaders converted it in the NKVD files into a conspiratorial organization aiming at an armed rising against the Soviet power. An unusual feature of one of these confessions was a machine-gun, which had been found in the armoury at a branch office. It was a real machine-gun, but it had been divided lengthwise into two and had been used for demonstration and instruction. The old campaigner had now been arrested for the third and no doubt for the last time, and his dream of spending the evening of his days quietly in the bosom of his family had been dispelled.

The other supporter of Makhno, Sinkovsky, who under the name of Lovka-Sadov had been the hero of one of the last novels of Alexei Tolstoy, had been the head of Makhno's counter-espionage service. His reputation for brutality was well known. He had fled abroad with Makhno after his defeat, but had accepted an offer from the NKVD to return to Russia, had entered its service and attained high office as head of its foreign department. Now he had been arrested. He was not charged with his former activity in Makhno's service, but with fresh plotting and espionage. In prison he turned out to be a gentle, intelligent and sensitive man with a taste for literature, and he entertained his cell-mates by telling them tales out of books, including his own, which he did with great drama and effect. He also showed an interest in and understanding of religious questions. He professed with obvious sincerity that there was nothing he detested so much as cruelty and violence.

Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka [later the GPU and then the NKVD], was a gentle, highly-educated man, belonging to an old noble family, who had distinguished himself by the spirit with which he had stood up to years of imprisonment in the Tsarist prisons in Poland. Service to an abstract idea is capable of leading to cruelty on a scale of which personal cruelty is quite incapable. That is the only explanation of certain aspects of the Soviet system.

The overwhelming majority of the numerous former

Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, genuine oppositionists and Trotskyists had long since given up any hope that their political ideas would ever come to anything, but there were said to be a very few illegal campaigners still among them. We ourselves did not meet any of them, but we were told by cell-mates about such open and declared opponents of Bolshevism, who were repeatedly arrested but returned again and again to illegal activity, and passionately harangued their cell-mates and the examining magistrates on their anarchist, Menshevik or Trotskyist ideas.

In one respect things were easier for these people than for the great bulk of the prisoners. They, like many of the priests, were consciously fighting a declared enemy. They could feel they were martyrs to a cause, and draw strength from that fact. But even then they were not always able to hold out. The most shameful of all confessions was demanded of them, namely that they had been Tsarist informers and *agents provocateurs*.

One former Menshevik has risen higher and higher. At that time he was Public Prosecutor of the Soviet Union—Vyshinsky.

(9) *People Associated with Celebrities*

The Soviet citizen instinctively fears getting too near the limelight in which all prominent Soviet figures are bathed, for he is aware of the danger of being swept into the abyss with them when they are overthrown. Large numbers of people were to be met with in prison who appeared to belong to none of the categories described. But on closer observation they would turn out to have been associated in some way with some prominent personality. One would have been chauffeur to a People's Commissar, another secretary to an important party official or batman to a senior officer. The explanation was simple. Circumstantial evidence was needed to make plausible the "legends" confessed by these important people. Their underlings were required to fill in the details of the bigger pictures, the conspiracies and terrorist plots which existed in the records of the NKVD and were sometimes exhibited to the public at a "show" trial.

Underlings were frequently arrested before their masters were touched. Statements incriminating the latter were systematically collected from them, and their masters were confronted with these after their arrest. Such statements were always available to prove to the highest authorities the anti-Soviet activities of those they wished to dispose of. Evidence was collected in this way against important people even if they were never arrested. We shared a cell with the caretaker of a villa near Kiev which served as a holiday home for People's Commissars. After severe beatings he had agreed to make a statement incriminating G. I. Petrovsky, then President of the Ukrainian Republic. We also met Petrovsky's secretary, who suffered the same fate. Petrovsky, who was a member of the Politburo, died in 1942 without having been arrested.

High Soviet officials were always accompanied by one or more NKVD officials, who acted as their bodyguard, accompanied them everywhere and even played a considerable part in their private lives. It was their duty to report all their master's movements to the NKVD, but they usually shared his fate when he was arrested, if they had not been arrested beforehand.

(10) *Cases of Mistaken Identity*

Russians are identified, not only by Christian and surname, but by patronymic as well, and the latter is always used. Nevertheless, cases of mistaken identity occasionally occurred, particularly with common surnames like Ivanov or Petrov, and the wrong person would sometimes be arrested. Such people were generally released after a few weeks or months. But we know of cases in which the wrongly arrested person had confessed to espionage or other serious crimes before the mistake was discovered. Even so, however, they were sometimes released.

(11) *The NKVD Organization*

From our description so far it might seem that the NKVD—at any rate at that time—played the part in the Soviet Union of a "State within the State" not unlike that played by the Gestapo in Nazi Germany. Every Soviet

citizen lived in permanent fear of the NKVD, which became more or less acute according to political circumstances. But it would be entirely false to conclude that members of the NKVD, who undoubtedly regarded themselves as masters of the State and its most important department, could lead their own lives in peace and security. It was a peculiarity of the Soviet Union that they could do nothing of the sort. Members of the NKVD, from the lowest to the highest, led a life as harassed as that of every other Soviet official of corresponding rank, and lived in equal or greater fear of arrest. Membership of the NKVD and knowledge of its methods and secrets actually constituted one of the "objective characteristics" which might sooner or later lead to arrest. The higher an official's rank in the NKVD, the greater danger he was in.

Before discussing NKVD officials as a category of prisoners, let us devote a little attention to the NKVD organization itself. It contained within itself a complete organization of its own, running parallel with the organization of the State and the separate organization of the party. It contained, for instance, a general political department, an economic affairs department, a military department, a transport department, a department for culture, etc., corresponding to the State departments of those names. Every factory or industrial undertaking, every State economic and administrative institution, every university, training college and scientific institution was controlled by several "heads". The director or manager was the representative of the State administration and the party secretary represented the party. The third side of the so-called official "triangle" was the chairman of the trades union organization for the body concerned. This last functionary was a relic of the "direct control of production by the workers", for which the Soviet Union stood in its early days.

The original idea was that the trades union should protect the workers' interests against encroachments by the State administration or mistakes by the party. But by the end of the twenties the rôle of the trade unions had lost a great deal of its significance. Their task had become that

of supervising and ensuring the "fulfilment of the norm", *i.e.*, the carrying out of production plans and the maintenance of work discipline. Side by side with it, however, every industrial undertaking or institution had a so-called "special section", a secret department, whose offices in every Soviet building were clearly indicated by the fact that the door was covered with iron sheeting. The iron was not intended to serve as armour-plate; it was symbolic. No ordinary mortal might pass through it.

People employed in the special section communicated with the rest of the establishment through a small sliding window which could be opened on the inside only. In bigger establishments the secret section often occupied a whole wing. Entry to the main building could generally be obtained by an "ordinary" permit, signed by the manager and the head of the "special section", but a "special" permit, signed by the same people, was required before anyone could pass through the "armour-plated" door. A sentry with fixed bayonet was posted beside it to ensure that no unauthorized person should pass.

The head of the secret section was responsible, not to the manager of the establishment, but to the NKVD. He was either appointed by it, or his appointment had to be confirmed by it. He acquired an ever-increasing influence over the management and in particular the personal politics of Soviet establishments, and thereby became an unofficial "fourth head".

The heads of the special sections of individual factories and institutions were responsible to the appropriate departments of the NKVD at local level. These were organized in districts and regions throughout each Soviet Republic, and so the hierarchy continued up to the top in Moscow. The whole apparatus, like that of the party, was completely centralized; the rigidity of the centralization, which was in such contrast to the nominally federal structure of the Soviet State, was ensured by personal politics.

Apart from these departments there were the Gulag, which we have already mentioned as being responsible for the administration of the forced labour camps and thus, incidentally, of whole branches of production and large

areas of the country; and a statistical department, responsible for all Soviet statistics, which are treated as secret in principle. Other departments were responsible for building railways, roads and canals throughout the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the supervision of the frontiers and the administration of frontier areas lay in the hands of appropriate departments of the NKVD, which was also responsible for the resettlement of populations.

Finally, troops stationed in a broad belt along the frontiers of the Soviet Union did not come under the control of the Ministry of Defence but were controlled by the NKVD and wore its uniform. They constituted a military force equipped with all arms. Detachments of these "Special NKVD Forces" were to be found in the interior too. They were used when unrest was feared, or as a reserve of strength when specially important Government measures were imposed, such as collectivization.

There was also the Chief Administration for State Security, which was later subordinated to the Ministry of State Security, but came under the same supreme control as the NKVD itself and was divided into a number of departments, which included: (i) an administrative department, responsible for the administration of the whole huge apparatus; (ii) an operations department which carried out arrests, provided liaison with the prosecuting authorities and was responsible for the transport and disposal of prisoners; (iii) the prison administration, responsible for guarding and feeding prisoners until they were taken over by the Gulag; (iv) the most important department, the secret intelligence department, which kept its eye on every branch of Soviet life through an army of so-called "seksots" (*sekretny-sotrudnik*, secret collaborator); and (v) the interrogation department, to which most of the examining magistrates belonged, and which was responsible for the interrogation of prisoners, as its name implied. But the cases of only a fraction of those arrested were conducted by the real interrogation department; most of them, even when the charge had no direct connection with espionage, were conducted by the much more feared and, in a sense, more powerful counter-espionage department.

There was also a foreign department, which was responsible for a great deal of espionage abroad and was divided into political, military and economic sub-departments. All the diplomatic and consular representatives of the Soviet Union abroad, all members of trade delegations and missions and, in fact, all who had any official contact whatsoever with foreigners, were subject to the control of this department. Personnel might be nominally responsible to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but they would consist almost exclusively of members of the NKVD seconded to it for the purpose. His rank by no means always represented a person's real importance. Well-known ambassadors, trade representatives, etc., were not infrequently dummies employed to take part in banquets and receptions and officially conduct negotiations, etc., while the real leader of the delegation was someone who concealed himself as a humble clerk but in reality occupied a far higher position than the ambassador in the NKVD or the party.

The Russian foreign espionage service used to be divided into three independent organizations. Military espionage was controlled by the People's Commissariat for Defence; and the Comintern had its own political and technical intelligence service, to which the corresponding secret sections of the various national parties were responsible. These were organized on a secret and conspiratorial basis even in countries where the party itself was not illegal. Thirdly and lastly, there was the NKVD foreign department, which maintained its own independent espionage organization, which must have taken over control of the espionage sections of the national parties after the official dissolution of the Comintern.

The tasks of these three organizations overlapped a great deal, and each undertook tasks other than those for which it was originally intended. Much use was made of the good will and sympathy felt for the Soviet Union by innumerable foreign workers and many intellectuals. If a person who seemed suitable by reason of his personality, position or occupation displayed Communist leanings, the technique would be to restrain him from openly declaring himself in favour of Communism, to induce him not to join the party officially, but to indoctrinate him further and bind him more firmly to its philosophy. When a point had been reached at which he could be regarded as reliable he would be placed in the hands of the organization's contact men, with whom he would have regular secret meetings. At first he would be given relatively harmless intelligence assignments, but gradually he would be given more and more important tasks, suited to his position and training. As a member of the organization he would be subject to strict discipline. Once he had transgressed the laws of his country he was irretrievably caught in the net.

Up to the beginning of the thirties an enormous number of workers and intellectuals, animated by sheer idealism and believing that in this way they were serving the cause of world revolution, worked for the various Soviet organizations abroad at great risk to themselves and entirely without material compensation or reward. An atmosphere of close and comradely co-operation prevailed in these organizations, particularly in that of the People's Commissariat for Defence, though each man knew only his immediate superior and one or two contact men. These people regarded professional espionage, done for material gain, as utterly dishonourable and beneath contempt. The risks they faced, the greatness of their cause, and finally a certain romantic quality inherent in secret work, formed the strongest bond between these people. Young people took to the work with enthusiasm. These organizations were a priceless means of acquiring military, technical and political information for the Soviet Union.

The Yezhov period, however, brought about a significant change. The other organizations were abolished and the NKVD foreign organization alone remained. This period was characterized by the deep and heartfelt distrust felt by the Soviet régime for any kind of idealism or ideological bond. The result was a fundamental change in the methods used by the foreign organization. Paid agents took the place of enthusiastic Communists working illegally for nothing. The NKVD foreign organization substituted methods of compromise and blackmail for voluntary

co-operation, and set itself the ambition of remodelling its espionage system on the presumed pattern of that of other countries.

A remarkable feature of the NKVD foreign organization, as well as of the Defence Commissariat, was, as we have already mentioned, the large number of Latvians to be found in leading positions. Whether in connection with the arrest of Latvians as members of a national minority, or as people concerned with foreign countries, or as senior officials of the military organization, or whatever the motive may have been, the fact remains that nearly all the members of the foreign organization were gradually recalled to the Soviet Union and arrested as spies. The result was that Soviet agents were to be met with far more frequently in Soviet prisons than agents of foreign Powers. We remember, for instance, a Soviet agent who had returned to Russia after serving a sentence of eight years' imprisonment for spying in Rumania. He was immediately arrested by the NKVD as a Rumanian spy, and was completely bewildered by what had happened to him. The chief of the Soviet espionage service who had originally sent him abroad, and to whom he now appealed, had also been arrested. Practically all the senior officials of the Russian espionage system, in so far as they returned to the Soviet Union, found themselves in prison.

The most important and most feared department of the NKVD was the so-called "special department", which was an NKVD within the NKVD. Just as the NKVD was surrounded by an aura of fear throughout the Soviet Union, so was the special department surrounded by an aura of still greater fear inside the NKVD itself. Similar special departments existed in every military formation, from battalion upwards, and in every concentration camp.

The core of the NKVD was provided by the "old Chekists", as they proudly called themselves. These were Communists of long standing who had taken part in the Revolution and the civil war and had proved their toughness and reliability. Most were of proletarian extraction, but many came from the petty bourgeois intelligentzia. Two

People's Commissars in the Ukraine, Balitsky and Uspensky, and Troitsky, head of the special department, came from clerical families and had been pupils in a theological college. Incidentally, Stalin, as is well known, was also a theological student.

Apart from the hard core of old revolutionaries, NKVD staff was not recruited on a voluntary basis. This was true as early as the end of the twenties. The NKVD could not be chosen as a career. People whose character and inclination seemed fitted for such work were drawn into it. Their social origin had, of course, to be unobjectionable, and correct conduct at every change of the party line was obviously indispensable. At the beginning of the thirties it was essential to be a member of the Komsomol or of the party, and the NKVD selected its own staff by "claiming" them through the party. Such "claiming", which was by no means always welcome, was officially regarded as a great honour, and to have refused would have meant the political death of the individual concerned.

In practice most of the staff were chosen from students—Komsomol members who paid less attention to their studies than to "social work", and filled all sorts of political or administrative posts. Consequently only a few of them completed their university education. The completion of a student's course was only insisted on in the case of those recruited for the technical or economic departments.

The living conditions of NKVD officials varied greatly according to their rank, as indeed they did in every branch of Soviet life. The pay and accommodation of minor officials was less than modest, though substantially better than that of other officials of equivalent rank. The senior and chief officials, however, had high salaries, were entitled to spacious flats, had official cars at their disposal, which they could use privately, and lacked nothing that the country could supply. They could buy goods at cheap prices in special shops, available only to members of the NKVD, which were always well stocked, even in times of scarcity. They and their families spent their leave in special NKVD holiday homes and sanatoria in the Caucasus or the Crimea;

but even there the degree of comfort to which they were entitled and the quality and quantity of their rations strictly depended on their rank. Officials of general's rank did not smoke the same cigarettes as majors, who in turn smoked different cigarettes from lieutenants.

But even the greatest luxury which Soviet life could offer to the highest officials of the NKVD scarcely compensated them for the nerve-shattering nature of their work. This applied particularly to the examining magistrates and their superiors. Examining magistrates had to work regularly till perhaps four or five in the morning, because experience over the years had shown that interrogation at night was more productive than interrogation in the daytime. The prisoner was subjected to interrogation, with all its attendant horrors, for only a few weeks or months at a time, but the examining magistrate had to carry on with it year in and year out, and this was only possible with the continual use of drugs. In addition there was the perpetual goading by superiors, the perpetual calls for "vigilance", the pressure from above for the continual discovery of new plots and espionage organizations. Nervous breakdowns among examining magistrates were the order of the day.

One of us during his long interrogation once observed a collapse on the part of his examining magistrate. He was a young lieutenant, obviously fairly new to the work, who sat at a desk, deputizing for the chief examining magistrate, while the prisoner had to stand. The endless repeatedly question: "Who recruited you?" started growing less frequent, and the stupefied prisoner suddenly saw the examining magistrate burst into a flood of tears. He allowed the prisoner to sit, gave him a drink of tea from his own glass, offered him a cigarette, called for a relief, and the interrogation then continued.

Hardly any of the examining officials, perhaps only the simplest, fully believed in the prisoners' guilt. Most of them told themselves that they were confronted with "enemies of the people" and dutifully carried out their task of extorting confessions, knowing that the accused were lying and that their "legends" were untrue, but convinced all the same that there must be "something in it". The cynics, who knew

perfectly well what was happening, were rather the exception; the overwhelming majority repressed all doubts about the rightness of what they were doing. They never asked themselves any awkward questions, because the answers would have brought their whole universe tumbling about their ears. Meanwhile they continued doing what was required of them, partly out of loyalty to the Soviet cause, partly out of ambition, lack of civil courage and, not least, because of fear of being arrested themselves. Thus one had the curious picture of a country living in terror of an organization the members of which could not enjoy the fruits of their power, because they lived in terror themselves. The NKVD lived in terror of the special department, the members of which themselves lived in terror of a change in their superiors, which would bring about their downfall.

Socially, members of the NKVD enjoy the greatest respect in the Soviet Union. They formed an *élite*, rather like the officers' corps in old Prussia. A good presence, good manners and the best-quality clothing were taken for granted. Members of the NKVD had the smartest and most beautiful wives, who proudly exhibited their jewellery and their toilettes. These women frequently came from the former well-educated, wealthy classes. The NKVD displayed a certain exclusiveness. They tended rather to cut themselves off from the other sections of the party aristocracy to which they themselves belonged, from the military aristocracy and the senior technical intelligentzia. For a woman whose social extraction did not conform to Soviet requirements marriage to a senior NKVD official naturally produced a high degree of immunity and protection, the advantages of which also extended to some extent to her family. For men, however, such marriages, though they were frequent, were regarded as *mésalliances*, and later, when the NKVD itself was purged, often had disastrous consequences.

The beginnings of the creation of an NKVD caste could be seen in other ways too. Their children attended special schools, and junior posts in the NKVD were often filled by younger members of the families of high officials.

Highly placed personalities elsewhere in the State or party apparatus also sought to place their children in the NKVD. Thus many family inter-connections arose within the apparatus.

Another large group of people in the Soviet Union consisted of those who undertook special duties on behalf of the NKVD without being members of the organization. Certain work of special economic, military or political importance was restricted to people in this category. They had to fill in innumerable and particularly exhaustive questionnaires about themselves and their families and, after being thoroughly "screened", were eventually permitted to do confidential work. Certain documents, for instance, could be typed only by "confidential" typists and carried only by "confidential" messengers. In factories the special section's offices could be cleaned only by "confidential" charwomen, and everyone employed by the NKVD, however insignificant, was naturally "confidential". Similar arrangements exist, of course, in other countries, but the extraordinary rigidity with which the conception of "confidential" was applied and the enormous number of "confidential" people were peculiar to the Soviet Union. Large sections of industry and transport, and large areas of the Soviet Union, were regarded as "confidential", and this made for great complication in administration and economic life.

The special obligations of these "confidential" workers to the NKVD were known, but this was not the case with the large number of "secret collaborators", the seksots, whom we have already mentioned. These were to be found throughout the population. It was as good as certain that the messengers, chauffeurs, secretaries and translators of everybody who occupied any sort of leading position in the political or economic administration, the army or the NKVD, were seksots. They had to report on their superiors and their families at regular intervals. The opinions, the private life, the social contacts of every person of any importance in the Soviet Union, were constantly spied and reported on from several quarters at the same time, and the reports were checked with one another. Even

if a seksot felt well disposed towards the person on whom he was spying, and wished to keep something dark, he would always be in fear that information might come from some other quarter. The work of a seksot was nominally entirely voluntary, but the NKVD had means of "persuading" anyone it considered suitable to undertake the work. As soon as a group of friends began to form in a factory or any other institution or establishment, but particularly among students, the NKVD tried to make a member of the group a seksot, so that it should know exactly what was going on.

To make people become seksots, the NKVD would appeal to their Soviet conscience and represent the work as harmless, but in most cases the inducement would be the promise of alleviation of the fate of an arrested member of the prospective seksot's family. If this failed, intimidation and threats would be employed.

Many complied with the NKVD request without further ado, but some only did so after long hesitation; and nearly all started with the idea that the work could do no harm, so long as they kept strictly to the truth and reported nothing disadvantageous about the people concerned. But they soon found out that incriminating material, and only incriminating material, was required, independently of whether there was anything incriminating to report. Then the NKVD started putting more and more pressure on them, and they started interpreting in an incriminating sense harmless incidents in the lives of the people on whom they were reporting, or minor, inadvertent mistakes in their work. When this failed to satisfy the NKVD they ended by giving free rein to their imagination, and simply invented what was required. A large number of these seksots ended up in gaol; we shall tell the story of one of them in the next chapter. The Soviet citizen fears nothing so much as to stray into this path, and with good reason. Love, friendships and family relationships were all exposed to the activity of the seksots, and thus to the possibility of tragedy.

Beautiful women and girls were often chosen as seksots by the NKVD; married women and the wives of leading officials were also frequent choices. The only way of escaping

from this form of activity, when it was pressed upon one, was to make oneself out to be as stupid as possible, and a hopeless chatterbox on trivial matters.

Foreigners in particular were surrounded by seksots at every step. The staff of Intourist hotels and offices consisted exclusively of such people. All interpreters were secret workers for the NKVD.

In this connection we should mention the only form in which practically undisguised prostitution existed in the Soviet Union. Nearly every foreigner who has ever stayed in a Moscow hotel has had strange adventures with these NKVD girls. He would find himself talking on the telephone to a girl who acted as if she had been put through to the wrong number, but nevertheless claimed to be an old acquaintance. If the foreigner fell into the trap, the young lady would try to bring the conversation round to dangerous topics; often an attempt would be made to compromise him socially.

This phenomenon was all the more remarkable in that not only does open prostitution no longer exist in the Soviet Union as it exists abroad, but it is regarded with the deepest abhorrence and considered utterly incompatible with human dignity. The setting up of brothels for German and Hungarian officers and men in occupied Russia during the recent war caused as much indignation among the Soviet population as did the mass extermination of Jews. The indignation of young people who had grown up under the Soviet system and had gone abroad for the first time could be noted time and again. They simply could not understand how a civilized State could permit such a thing as open prostitution, which contradicted all their notions of human dignity.

Officials of the NKVD were at least as much in danger of arrest as any of the other categories we have mentioned, with the possible exception of foreigners. When Yezhov succeeded Yagoda there was a complete change in all the leading positions in the NKVD, and in 1939 it was Yezhov's turn, and he went. In the Ukraine three People's Commissars for Internal Affairs, Balitsky, Leplevsky and Uspensky, were arrested one after the other.

Each of these "changes of shift" was followed by a complete change of staff, and all those who lost their jobs, with very few exceptions, were arrested. It was not at all uncommon for an ordinary prisoner who chanced to remain in prison under examination for several years to find that ten or a dozen examining magistrates who had interrogated him had been arrested themselves. Each of the present writers outlasted more than ten of his examining magistrates; one of them outlasted more than a dozen. In both instances this included the magistrate who had ordered the arrest. But this brought no relief to the prisoner. The fact that one's examining magistrate had himself become "an enemy of the people" did not detract from the weight or credibility or legal force of one's indictment, or of any confession that might have been extracted. This dialectical logic, which did not recognize the principle of the double negative, was difficult to get used to.

At the beginning of 1938 departmental heads in the NKVD administration were still usually of general's or at least colonel's rank. But promotion failed to keep pace with the loss of senior officers through arrest. By the end of 1939 departmental chiefs in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic were captains or lieutenants. In the middle of 1939 the highest officers in the People's Commissariat, apart from the People's Commissar himself, were majors, and it was quite usual for sergeants to act as examining magistrates in cases which in 1937 would have been conducted by majors at least. Every prisoner could observe for himself the progressive deterioration in rank of his successive examining magistrates. In the course of barely three years' imprisonment we saw men becoming heads of departments whom we had known as junior assistants before they had acquired lieutenant's rank. These small people from provincial towns who rose meteor-like to important positions in the big cities had naturally had no experience of the remarkable conditions under which confessions had been obtained, or knew of them only by hearsay. Moreover, the methods of interrogation which were universal under Yezhov were relatively rarely used under his successor Beria, though they never completely went out of use. Thus at the end of the Yezhov

period the great majority of the young examining magistrates were more or less genuinely convinced of the guilt of the "enemies of the people", and of the reality of their confessions.

With the end of the Yezhov period individual examining magistrates—naturally after their arrest—started being accused in the Press of having extorted false confessions from prisoners by violent means. Public trials of examining magistrates actually took place, and they were sentenced to two to three years' imprisonment or forced labour for exceeding their official duties as laid down in the criminal code. Thus Captain Shiroky, head of the political executive department of the Kiev NKVD, was arrested after he had been appointed head of the NKVD for the Moldavian Republic, and he was sentenced to be shot for this sort of crime at a public trial at Tiraspol, though the fate of the countless prisoners for whose confessions and sentences he was responsible was not, of course, in any way alleviated. One of us actually knew him as a not particularly harsh examining magistrate. In any case there is no doubt that he acted only on the specific orders of his superiors. As so often in the Soviet Union, particularly at the time of the enforcement of collectivization, individual instances, characteristic of the Government's general trend, were arbitrarily picked out, branded as "subordinate officialdom exceeding its authority", or sometimes as deliberate subversive activity, and severely punished.

There is actually a word for this in Soviet terminology—*peregib*, deflection or exaggeration of the party line. A mass phenomenon, specifically ordered from above, is subsequently condemned in individual cases and ascribed to "subordinate officialdom exceeding its authority". The mass consequences are not, however, affected.

The behaviour of NKVD officials in the cells was quiet, modest and comradely. The attitude of the other prisoners towards them was completely friendly, and feelings of vindictiveness towards them were exceptional. Many stories were told of prisoners who were joined in their cells by examining magistrates by whom they had been interrogated, but no such experience ever came our way.

Arrested NKVD officials were treated in the same way as other prisoners, except that their interrogation tended to be more severe. They failed to share the general optimism of the others, or to take part in the invention of confessions. They were extremely stubborn and reluctant to confess, for they knew what lay ahead of them. They were nearly always indicted under Article 58 (i) of the penal code, *i.e.*, for high treason. They expected to be executed at any moment, though they had not been convicted, and the slightest sound always made them start, but their behaviour was always very reserved and quiet, and as a rule they took the greatest care never to reveal any NKVD secrets.

Most of them admitted that their faith in the Soviet had never been shaken until their arrest. Previously, in spite of all the improbabilities of the confession "legends", they had professed to regard the prisoners as at least potential "enemies of the people", enemies of the Soviet system. For the first few days they tended to regard their arrest as a misunderstanding, which would easily be cleared up. When permitted to do so, they would write letters and complaints to former colleagues and superiors who were now their examining magistrates, and only gradually did it dawn on them that their fellow prisoners were no more "enemies of the people" than they were.

CHAPTER VII

THREE CASES

In the foregoing chapters we have tried to draw a systematic picture of the purge, the sections of the population affected by it and the part played by the NKVD in the country as a whole. We deliberately avoided the method of personal reminiscence and chose instead a historical, descriptive method which must inevitably result in a loss of vividness and humanity.

To make up for this to some extent we have decided to describe three cases in somewhat greater detail. We shall tell the story of a cell-mate, so far as possible in his own words, as he told it to us himself, partly in an NKVD cell which we shared with him for a considerable time, partly after his release. We have added nothing to his story, and changed nothing. His story concerns his own and two other typical Soviet cases. Knowing his character, we can guarantee the accuracy of his story, which, moreover, we were able to check from other sources.

The more subjective nature of this narrative represents a certain departure from the objectivity at which we aimed. We have so far as possible avoided making any moral judgments ourselves, and we do not associate ourselves with any such judgments in his story. We merely present it unaltered as a piece of first-hand evidence.

We do not present the three cases which he describes as being particularly horrifying, and we do not suggest that the fate of the individuals concerned was in any way out of the ordinary. There were many far worse cases. We give them simply because they are typical, because they illustrate NKVD methods, and because our thorough knowledge of the circumstances and the personality of the narrator guarantees that there is no exaggeration and that the story is completely in accordance with the facts. It may therefore be of interest to follow the fate of the people here described from the "checking-up" process through to the

confession and beyond as reflected in the personal feelings of the narrator.

A few words about the narrator himself. He is a well-known historian, and was professor of ancient history at a leading Russian university, where he held the chair of ancient history and later that of mediaeval history also. His father was in the higher ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and he completed his historical studies at St. Petersburg before the Revolution as a distinguished pupil of the noted historian Rostovtzeff, who emigrated after the Revolution, became a professor at Yale University and recently died. As a historian he belongs to the school founded by Eduard Meyer, Rostovtzeff and others, which acknowledges the predominant rôle played in history by economics. They could not conceivably be stamped as orthodox Marxists. Under Soviet rule he naturally never opposed the orthodox conception of history, either in his speech or in his writings. But let him speak for himself.

Soviet men of learning had already experienced several purges. One of the most thorough was that which followed Stalin's well-known letter to the editor of *The Proletarian Revolution* in 1931. In this Stalin accused Soviet scholars of being unpolitical and of falling behind in the fulfilment of the task of Soviet construction. He demanded the complete subordination of learning, and ultimately of all intellectual activity, to the tasks and aims of Communist politics.

Scholars had all to repent of every possible sin and accuse themselves remorselessly. This was called "self-criticism". They had continually to stress their loyalty to Marxism-Leninism and their devotion to the task of Soviet construction. For many this "checking-up" was followed by dismissal and arrest.

The purge of 1931–32 did not affect me closely. I was not young enough to have to take part in the offensive against the older generation, and I was not old or important enough to be an object of attack myself. Consequently, apart from some minor incidents, I was neither subjected to a "check-up" nor drawn into the "check-ups" of my colleagues.

In 1937, however, the situation grew much more serious. I became the target for the most savage attacks by my assistants and pupils, I was submitted to every kind and degree of "checking" and "criticism and self-criticism", and my *via dolorosa* ended with arrest.

My "check-up" began with the appearance in the university magazine of an article under the characteristic title: "Intentionally or by mistake?" The author of the article, one of my pupils—incidentally an entirely ungifted one—who belonged to the category of "activists" and was making a career for himself—took Joan of Arc under his wing and that of the party.

I was accused of deviation from the party line because in a lecture on the Hundred Years' War I had described the famous French heroine as nervous and highly strung. Dimitrov, secretary-general of the Comintern, had announced at the last congress that the French Communists had denied the right of the Fascists to claim Joan of Arc, the French national heroine, as a champion of their Fascist philosophy. In other words, the French Communists wished to appear to be good patriots, for Joan of Arc had shared in the people's struggle for liberation from a foreign oppressor. The Communists approve only "just" wars, never aggressive ones. The war for liberation against the English counted as just. That was the line of Dimitrov's argument. But I, by calling Joan of Arc highly strung in my lecture, had detracted from her significance as champion and representative of the struggling people, and had thereby also failed to respect the statement of a party leader. Thus I had deviated from the general party line in the matter of national movements and had exposed myself as a bourgeois scholar. That is what I was accused of in an article in the university wall-newspaper.

All this happened in the years 1936–37. Two years earlier no Soviet historian would have dared mention Joan of Arc in a lecture at all. It would have stamped him as an "idealist", for Marxist historical science in the first place had denied the significance of individual rôles in the historical process, especially the rôles of "heroes and heroines", and above all it had repudiated such heroes or heroines as

were canonized by the Church. In the second place Marxist history at that time had been exclusively the history of the class struggle, and certainly not the history of ordinary wars and superstitions, and it could not spare room for such incidental details as the Hundred Years' War, still less for fairy-tales such as that of Joan of Arc. A Soviet historian could only have mentioned Joan of Arc to illustrate "mediaeval superstition" and "the reactionary and treacherous rôle of the Church".

That had been the position two years before, but in the meantime there had been a fundamental change. The Hundred Years' War, like other historical phenomena ("wars", "diplomacy", "the ideologies", everything which had previously been neglected and scorned), now occupied a considerable place in the teaching of history. Joan of Arc, from being an "impostor" or a "victim of mediaeval superstition and ecclesiastical deceit", had been transformed into "the national heroine of the French people" and "the champion of a just war of liberation". The Bolshevik Party had taken her under its wing. Such are dialectics.

My colleagues had similar adventures. The mediaevalist Brechkevich, for example, in a lecture on Machiavelli, quoted Karl Marx, who, as is well known, admired him greatly. But meanwhile Vyshinsky, the Public Prosecutor of the Soviet Union, had charged a prisoner at a public trial with Machiavellism, thereby, among other things, damning Machiavelli. Brechkevich had missed Vyshinsky's speech in the newspaper and contented himself with his reference to Marx. This was a very unfortunate occurrence, and he was accused of neglecting the world of politics, ignoring the statements of party leaders and of having shown himself politically indifferent.

It was not only the position of Soviet historians, however, which had become so difficult; the same applied to Soviet scholars in general. Propositions which had been unassailable dogma one day turned out next day to be heresies, deviations from the party line, etc., and woe to him who failed to keep pace with these dialectical shifts and changes!

The Joan of Arc business was to cost me dear. For along with it many other mistakes and sins of mine were remembered, not the least of which was my social origin. All this, however, was only the beginning. Joan of Arc was followed by Midas. To illustrate a point in one of my lectures I had mentioned the legend of Midas, I think in connection with the invention of money. The legend had no particular importance in the context, and I had merely mentioned it in passing, so it may be that I did not sufficiently emphasize some minor aspect of it. Probably, however, I told an unfamiliar version of it.

Meanwhile Stalin, in one of his speeches on the cleavage between officials and the party masses, had mentioned the legend of Antaeus. It was now suggested to me by my critics, among them my own assistants, the "representatives of the younger generation", that only a bourgeois professor —and my name was mentioned—would neglect these myths and distort their context, thus setting his students a bad example, while Stalin, the most wise and brilliant leader of the party and of the workers of the whole world, showed the greatest respect for ancient mythology, and even quoted it in confirmation of his conclusions. The political significance of my mistake, in the opinion of my critics, lay in the fact that I had insufficient respect for the party leader's authority and did not accept his statements as my guiding principle. It sounds like a joke, but it was a joke with serious consequences.

The Midas incident was followed by more and more accusations, though the attacks on me were still isolated and individual. I felt more and more clearly that these were merely the preparations for the big offensive that was still to come, and sure enough this began in the late autumn of 1937, when the whole country was in the grip of an unprecedented purge. Eventually my turn came. For many days and nights I was the object of a "checking-up process" at meetings and sessions in the university attended by my colleagues, assistants and students. At the same time essays and articles violently criticizing my work appeared in the most varied periodicals and newspapers.

The accusations, as they generally are in such cases,

were tendentious, exaggerated, muddled and not infrequently actually untrue. I was charged in particular with Trotskyism, bourgeois ideology in general, and neglecting the classics of Marxism-Leninism. To illustrate the nature of such a campaign, let me be permitted to quote a few examples.

What did my Trotskyism consist of, for instance? In a study of ancient and Christian demonology I had expressed the following thoughts. Country people are always backward, I had suggested, and linger behind the historical development of the ruling class. It was a pretty commonplace idea, but my critics drew the following conclusion from it. Who had spoken of the backwardness of the peasantry? Leo Trotsky! The theory that peasants were backward in historical development was obvious Trotskyism, so a historian who advanced such a proposition must himself be a Trotskyist. I was therefore a Trotskyist. In another essay, on peasant revolts in the Roman Empire, I had shown that a part in the Donatist movement in North Africa had been played by the struggle for national independence—Numidian against Roman—and this sufficed to stamp me as a bourgeois nationalist as well. I had become a Trotskyist and a bourgeois nationalist at the same time—a little too much for one man. But I was also charged with "bowing to the authority of bourgeois science"—I had quoted west European scholars—and "neglect of the classical heritage" (the omission of a few quotations from Marx, Lenin and Stalin).

Day by day the criticisms grew coarser and more violent, and eventually voices began to be raised, crying: "Crucify him!" or, in Soviet jargon, demanding an administrative degree, *i.e.*, dismissal and arrest. The sword of Damocles hung more and more threateningly over my head, and my fate became clearer and clearer.

In the course of 1937 a series of incidents occurred which were obvious warning signals. In the spring of that year my closest personal friends and colleagues in the university were arrested—Lomov, a historian and former Menshevik, and Perov, a literary historian. They were almost the last friends of mine who remained at liberty.

I was naturally sorry for my friends, but I was not only sorry for them. I was also afraid of them. After all, they could say things about conversations we had had, in which we had not always expressed the orthodox view. There had been nothing criminal in those conversations; they had contained no attacks on the Soviet power. But the trivial criticisms and grumbles and expressions of resentment and disappointment which occurred in every conversation forced every Soviet citizen to feel guilty.

In the summer of the same year a remarkable occurrence took place. A. Lubchenko, the president of the council of People's Commissars for the Ukraine, committed suicide, after killing his wife, N. Krupenik. The effect of this event on the Ukraine was similar to that of the Kirov murder for the Soviet Union as a whole. We had already been taught a lesson by the consequences of the suicide of another Ukrainian People's Commissar in 1934. It had been followed by mass arrests of alleged Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists from the most varied intellectual circles. Many had to answer for that kind of political demonstration with their life or their freedom. Similar consequences, but on a larger scale, were to be expected from the Lubchenko case.

There was every likelihood of my being affected by the double suicide of the Lubchenko couple. I was bound in any event to be regarded as a Ukrainian bourgeois nationalist. True, I had never had anything to do with Ukrainian nationalism, and had never had any sympathy with it, but I had a typically Ukrainian surname, and I had had several sympathizers with Ukrainian nationalism among my acquaintances.

My position was made more difficult by the fact that Lubchenko's wife had been a university lecturer, *i.e.*, a colleague of mine, and chairman of the university trade union committee into the bargain. This meant that the NKVD would look for followers of and sympathizers with her husband among her university colleagues. What difference would it make that in the whole of my career I had never exchanged more than a few trifling words with her? What difference would it make that I had never

been invited to any of the receptions and parties given by this important woman official? The arrest of my colleagues and the suicide of Lubchenko forced me to think very seriously about my position. The "check-up" which I have already described above left me in no doubt about its gravity.

On top of all this there was another incidental phenomenon typical of Soviet conditions. People I knew well, who realized my impending fate as well as I did myself, started cautiously avoiding me. They failed to recognize me when we met, or hurried across the street. Some did this quite brazenly, others with scarcely concealed shame. At last my hour came. During the night of March 18th, 1938, I was arrested and, after a brief house search, taken to the NKVD prison.

I have explained that my arrest did not come as a surprise. I had been prepared for it for a whole year; actually I had been expecting it for longer than that, but for the past year I had been prepared for it at any minute. But why this eternal fear of arrest? Was it the knowledge of its inevitability? What guilt did one feel towards the Soviet Union?

To the last question I can answer with complete sincerity; none whatever. In any case I certainly felt no guilt which might have justified my arrest. It is true that my father had been an Orthodox priest, but Stalin had said: "The son is not responsible for his father."

I had always been reserved in conversation with friends and acquaintances, though I must admit to having occasionally made critical remarks about certain aspects and incidents of Soviet life. In my public capacity I had always been completely loyal, and I had never been an inflexible and irreconcilable enemy of Bolshevism. I was not a Soviet "activist" or "non-party Bolshevik". I was a loyal Soviet citizen. Was that not enough?

I was accused of "bourgeois tendencies", of "idealism" and of "anti-Marxism". But these were exaggerations, as my critics well knew. It was the compulsory dogmatization of Marxism that seemed to me to be repugnant and false. I could not claim to be an orthodox Marxist, because

the continual alterations in the party line made a consistent attitude of orthodoxy incompatible with scientifically founded conviction. But in my scientific work I always tried to remain within the bounds of the official instructions, to use "the classical heritage" to the full, and to conform with the intentions of Soviet policy. To some extent I must have succeeded in this, for my audiences, who were very demanding, had always been very satisfied with me and, until my "check-up", I had been regarded as a loyal Soviet scholar. Nevertheless I was prepared for arrest. Why? Because, like all other Soviet citizens, I carried about with me a consciousness of guilt, an inexplicable sense of sin, a vague and indefinable feeling of having transgressed, combined with an ineradicable expectation of inevitable punishment. Thus each one of us had been shaped by "sifting" and "checking", criticism and self-criticism. The arrest of acquaintances, colleagues and friends who felt just as guilty or guiltless as ourselves intensified this state of mind.

When, after the usual formalities, I was put into a solitary cell, I at first felt something almost approaching relief; relief after the heavy days of a Soviet scholar's normal life. The day was filled to overflowing with an endless burden of work, with lectures, conferences and meetings. One sometimes worked fifteen or sixteen hours a day, without counting the work one did at home. On top of this there were the continual political anxieties. After every lecture one wondered whether one had tripped up over Marxism or the party line, and how one's mistakes would be taken by the audience. "Intentionally or by mistake?" There was also the constant expectation of the eventually inevitable arrest. It was a hard life. Every Soviet citizen, at any rate every "responsible worker", lives in the same state, and the higher his position and the greater his responsibility, the heavier his burden.

In the solitude of my cell I was able to think over my position and ponder the possible reasons for my arrest. I was chiefly worried by the tormenting question of what punishment lay before me, what I was going to be charged with, and what I should say in my own defence or in mitigation of punishment. I thought it obvious that I should

be accused of the things for which I had already been criticized during my "check-up", but with the difference that my "mistakes" would now be converted into "crimes". The question whether I had committed them intentionally or by mistake would be answered differently this time, and certainly not to my advantage. The complaints made against me earlier would now be translated into the language of the criminal code as anti-Soviet propaganda or ideological counter-revolution. For this the penalty could range from three years' imprisonment to the "supreme penalty". The difference was considerable, but why should I expect the worst? Had my crime really been so serious? Joan of Arc? Midas? Must I pay with my life for a disparaging remark about the Maid of Orleans? Trotskyism? Nationalism? What proof was there of my guilt? My conversation with two colleagues during a break between lectures? But who had heard what I had said? Had two or three colleagues no right to say what they pleased in a private conversation? And supposing the NKVD did find out what my politics were as expressed in that conversation? Would that be sufficient to convict me as a criminal? The penal code spoke of propaganda; it made no mention of private conversation.

The result of these considerations was that I decided that I should not be sentenced to more than three years. This was certainly an unpleasant prospect. But in the Soviet Union how many were there who had never been in prison? Sooner or later it was inevitable, like measles for a child. Soviet citizens are divided into three groups, as the saying is; those who are in prison, those who have been in prison, and those who have not been in prison yet. I had merely been transferred from one group to another.

My reflections were interrupted by my removal to a different cell. The new cell was also a "solitary" cell, but there were a number of prisoners in it, five or six. These were my first prison acquaintances, and my instructors in the theory and practice of imprisonment, which to me was a completely new branch of learning. For me that school of imprisonment was simultaneously a school in which I learned the true nature of Bolshevism, or at any rate of the

Bolshevik system of intimidation and of guiding and influencing the masses.

I learned a great deal from each of my prison acquaintances. As I was an important political criminal in the eyes of the NKVD, I was kept with people of equal importance, and they turned out to be very interesting people indeed. Each was a new page in the book of Bolshevism which was now open before me, and I read the book with great attention. . . .

From what my cell-mates told me, I had every reason to believe that my case was far more serious than I had supposed. I had not known about the interrogation methods; the "persuasion", the "chair-leg", the prevention of sleep, and the denunciation of others. I had regarded self-condemnatory "legends" as a feature of the "show" trials. I had not realized that one would be expected of me.

Before I was taken to my examining magistrate for the first time I racked my brains to try and guess what "legend" I should be forced to invent, how I should harmonize it with the objective facts of my case, and how I should behave with regard to the "recruiting" question. It is worth noting that the idea of establishing my innocence or disputing my guilt never entered my head. It has been hammered into the skull of every Soviet citizen that disputing one's guilt is equivalent to casting doubt on the infallibility of the NKVD, and can only make matters worse. The NKVD knows what it is doing. If anyone is arrested, there must be important political grounds for it, which no one may question.

My "objective characteristics" laid me open to accusations of ideological sabotage or counter-revolutionary propaganda. Such accusations would fit in with the "methodical mistakes" about which I had heard so much in the course of my "check-up". But the situation turned out to be much more serious.

My first examining magistrate, Shapiro, chief of the third department of the NKVD (the so-called "counter-intelligence" department, which was regarded as the most drastic of them all), greeted me with the usual question, whether I felt guilty of counter-revolutionary activity. I

tried to reply evasively. I said that if my methodical mistakes, or certain statements I had made in private conversation, were to be regarded as counter-revolutionary activity, I must acknowledge myself guilty. Shapiro answered my attempt at evasion with insults and threats.

The chief method to which I was subjected was that of protracted interrogation, combined with continuous standing or sitting in an uncomfortable position and deprivation of sleep over a long period. I was subjected to interrogation day and night, uninterruptedly, for fifty days. I was allowed to sleep for not more than two or three hours a day, and then only sitting. There were even days, and not so few of them, when I was not allowed to sleep at all. My legs swelled from the "standing" and the "sitting", and lack of sleep strained my nervous system to the uttermost. I lost all power of feeling. I was not beaten, but I believe it would have had no further effect on me in the state to which lack of sleep reduced me. My examining magistrate was changed thirteen times in the course of my interrogation, and I discovered later that half of them had been arrested at various times and shared the fate of their victims. During my protracted interrogation each examining magistrate was relieved by a colleague after every eight hours or so.

Each examining magistrate started my case all over again. He was not in the least interested in the results of the interrogation up to the point at which he took over. Each successive magistrate was harsher and made more far-reaching demands than his predecessor. The result was that my case grew like an avalanche. My "ideological sabotage" and "counter-revolutionary agitation" were no more acceptable to my interrogators than was my "diversion on the ideological front". This device had failed me. I was charged with no less a crime than participation in and preparation of armed revolt against the Soviet power, and preparing to carry out terrorist acts against party leaders. The name of Kossior, first secretary of the Ukraine central committee, was mentioned as the intended victim of my alleged murder plot.

In the course of the interrogation it became clear to me

that the objective reason for the terrible charge lay in the fact that I had been employed for several years at one of the institutes of the Academy of Sciences, and that the head of this institute had been the well-known scholar and politician, the late Mikhail Gorsovsky. The NKVD had reasons, known only to itself, for representing the scientific work, on which Professor Gorsovsky had been busy after his return to the Ukraine from abroad, to have been a concealed form of anti-Soviet activity. Consequently everyone who had been even remotely connected with Gorsovsky's work was regarded by the NKVD as a member of an anti-Soviet political organization. The professor was regarded as having "recruited" his whole staff to this organization—a typical NKVD deduction. In this fairy-tale about Gorsovsky and his political organization the NKVD had assigned a part to me. I was now called upon to play this part in my interrogation, and perhaps at a subsequent "show" trial, with the late Professor Gorsovsky and Mr. A. Lubchenko appearing as ghosts, with their successors and pupils as the living cast.

My education in the cell had prepared me for something like this, but I tried to resist, particularly as I was called on to accuse many others besides myself. I could not harm Professor Gorsovsky, but his family remained—his wife, his daughter, his brother and others. There were also the former members of his staff, who, like me, were all candidates for membership of the counter-revolutionary organization.

The "objective basis" for an accusation, incidentally, was not necessarily having worked at the same place as somebody else. Mere acquaintanceship, a meeting at cards or over drinks, etc., were also sufficient. Thus every Soviet citizen has always to bear in mind that he can be accused at any moment of taking part in a counter-revolutionary plot, particularly if he has any other "objective characteristic", *e.g.*, the wrong kind of social origin.

My resistance was finally broken, not so much by the fifty-day interrogation and lack of sleep, as by confrontation with Gorsovsky's widow and daughter and with one of my colleagues, Mrs. N. M. Arkadian. Mrs. Gorsovskaya declared

when I was confronted with her that I had taken part in her and her husband's work for an anti-Soviet organization, the aim of which had been the preparation of an armed rising against the Sovet power. During my interrogation I had been shown statements in the dead professor's handwriting in which he had declared his scientific work to be concealed counter-revolutionary activity and had accused his staff of taking part in his plans. I knew he had been arrested by the NKVD some time before his death and that he had made such a confession, so I was not particularly surprised.

Professor Arkadian had gone even further. She had declared that Mrs. Lubchenko, the wife of the Ukrainian President, had told her confidentially that I had for long been a member of the "underground anti-Soviet organization" of which Gorsovsky and Lubchenko had simultaneously been leaders.

All this was, of course, pure fiction, and I was perfectly well aware of the methods of interrogation by which such statements were extracted. But I also realized that further resistance was useless, as sufficient evidence was available to convict me, so I resigned myself to my fate. I confessed that I had taken part in preparations for armed revolt and for acts of terrorism.

I had now found out why those involved in "show" trials so readily admitted every accusation, and the comparison with the mediaeval witch-trials no longer seemed to me to be amusing. There are circumstances in which a human being will confess anything.

I managed reasonably well to extricate myself from the "recruiting" quandary, though it was a difficult task. So far as possible I only incriminated those of my acquaintances who were dead, like Lubchenko and Gorsovsky, which fitted in well enough with my indictment, or mentioned people who had been subjected to the interrogation process before me. I was convinced that I could harm them no further, as they had already been given the punishment intended for them. When there was no alternative, and I had to mention people who were alive and at liberty, like Gorsovsky's brother, Professor A. Gorsovsky, Professor

Tirassov, a member of the Academy, and several others, I mentioned only incidents which were common knowledge, having been either published in the newspapers or publicly stated during the "check-ups" and "siftings" of the "criticism and self-criticism" process.

I was "broken", as those in the cells were called who had confessed to imaginary crimes. The interrogation became noticeably milder. Towards the end of my protracted interrogation I was actually allowed to spend a few hours of the day in bed. Something else that happened also seemed to point to the fact that my case was entering a less serious phase. After a few months my examining magistrate quite unexpectedly suggested that I should exclude from my statement all references to "terror" in my "criminal activity". I gladly did so, particularly as "terror", or participation in "terror", is a graver offence, involving heavier penalties, than preparation for revolt.

I thought at first that the reason why the references to "terror" were to be removed from my case was that they were not justified by my "objective characteristics" and were in insufficient harmony with the rest of my story. It later turned out that they were deleted in all instances where Kossior was mentioned as the intended victim of terrorist attacks.

In the cells we jumped to the conclusion that Kossior must have been arrested, and so it turned out. His picture had disappeared from the walls. Kossior was the first secretary of the Ukraine party committee and a member of the Politburo of the Central Committeee of the Communist Party. From being one of the highest officials in the land he was now transformed into an "enemy of the people", and in the circumstances it would certainly have been odd to have been convicted for trying to do away with him. The position of the NKVD was a little complicated, but no difficulty was experienced in finding a way out. Charges of "terror" in which his name occurred were simply dropped, or the names of other proposed victims were substituted for his. Alternatively the accused were just said to have plotted terrorist acts against leaders of the party and the Government in general.

My relief at the disappearance of "terror" from my files was premature; it was replaced by "espionage".

During the Yezhov period the overwhelming majority of prisoners were accused of espionage. There was a positive deluge of German, Japanese, Polish, Rumanian and other "spies". It had seemed to me rather odd that my indictment had included "rebellion" and "terror", but not "espionage". I had thought that the required "objective characteristics" must be lacking, but sure enough these were found, and very solid ones they were too.

For some years I had been head of the "Byzantological" committee of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences at Kiev. As the terms "Byzantology" and "Byzantological" were at that time, though not later, regarded by the Bolsheviks as reactionary, they had been replaced by the term "Near East". By including the history of Turkey, Persia and other Near Eastern countries it was possible to carry on the study of Byzantine history under a suitable disguise.

But the power of words is strong. The term "Near East" established a connection between me and the east. The eastern country most dangerous to the Soviet Union was Japan. Therefore I must have been in contact with Japan. This sounds like a joke, but it is the sober truth. My professional interest in ancient Byzantine history had led me into an association with Japan which was dangerous to the State. My examining magistrate, who had as little interest in history as in geography, saw no difference between the Near and Far East, the ancient, the mediaeval, and the modern. All he wanted was an "objective basis", and he found it.

My interest in Byzantium thus provided the first link in the chain required for accusing me of espionage on behalf of Japan. The second was soon found. As part of my so-called "social work" I had lectured about the art of war in antiquity to senior officers of the Red Army, and had talked to them about Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Caesar. This connected me "objectively" with the Red Army, and had given me the opportunity of carrying out espionage work, if I had wished to engage in it. Thus two points were now established. I had been spying for Japan,

and had done so by means of my lectures to Red Army officers. My object, in view of my counter-revolutionary attitude, had been to do my utmost to damage the Soviet power. All that was needed now was to prove that I had had contact with representatives of a foreign intelligence service. This, too, was forthcoming.

Professor Grosnyi, the well-known Czech orientalist and specialist in Hittite history, had visited Kiev in 1937, and the Society for Cultural Relations had organized a special reception in his honour. I was among those invited. I had even had the opportunity of talking to this distinguished foreigner for five or six minutes; rather a short time in which to have been recruited for a foreign intelligence service. Incidentally the chairman of the Society for Cultural Relations, one Velichko, was arrested for espionage soon after the reception; I met Smirnov, his successor, a former Soviet diplomatist, in an NKVD cell myself. The chairmanship of the Society for Cultural Relations was a very dangerous job.

Finally it was even discovered who had "recruited" me. The chairman of the scientific lectures committee, Mikhailov, who organized scientific lectures for the Red Army, was also a member of the committee for the study of Near Eastern history, as the former Byzantological committee was called, and he was a personal friend of mine. In the summer of 1937 he had travelled to the Far East to organize lectures to military units there. But, in the view of the NKVD, his real motive in going there had been either to make or to maintain contact with the Japanese intelligence service. Mikhailov was rewarded for his zeal by being arrested.

The various lecturers had submitted reports on their tours to Mikhailov, as chairman of the committee, and he was said to have used this material for espionage purposes; he had confessed to this under suitable pressure at his interrogation, and as he had close relations with me, both professionally and personally, he had made particular use of me in his espionage activities.

Mikhailov was helped in the preparation and completion of the material in his indictment by a certain

Professor Mokrov, from Odessa. Mokrov had sufficient imagination to make a convincing charge against himself out of so great a trump card as a single meeting with the Japanese consul in Odessa; and he had assigned appropriate rôles to himself, Professor Mikhailov, to me and to a great many other scholars in the Soviet Union, including the well-known Ukrainian orientalist, Professor A. Krymsky, and Bogomolets, the president of the Ukrainian Academy of Science.

Incidentally, the NKVD, to be prepared for any contingencies, collected material incriminating people in all important positions. Prisoners like Mokrov would denounce people entirely at random, or by request, whether they had ever set eyes on them or not. The "evidence" so collected would be put in the files of the people concerned. This would not prevent them from being awarded high decorations and honours, which many of them retain to the present day.

Krymsky, for instance, received the Order of the Red Banner of Labour on the occasion of his jubilee in 1940. He was, however, arrested at the outbreak of war in 1941. My involuntary accuser, Professor Arkadian, had attended a special reception for Soviet scholars in the Kremlin in June, 1938. Only particularly reliable scholars were invited; yet a month later she was in the cells. The same happened to others as well.

Well, I had turned out to be a Japanese spy, "recruited" by Mikhailov and Mokrov. According to the "legend" composed by the pair of them, I had passed on my information to Mikhailov in the form of reports on my lecture tours, as well as in private conversation with him. Mikhailov had passed it on to Mokrov, who had passed it on to the Japanese consul. So far it all looked pretty good. But what did my espionage reports contain? That was the only remaining missing link.

What information useful to the Japanese General Staff could I have collected in the course of my lectures to the Red Army? What was the value of my reports, and what were they about? I had once told Mokrov, for instance, that some senior officers in the Red Army had confused

Napoleon III with Napoleon I and Alexander the Great with Caesar. This was considered to be a report on "political morale" in the army. What else could I have reported on?

Could I have held out against my examining magistrate? Could I have denied the rôle assigned to me in the denunciations of those who had "recruited" me? Perhaps I could have done, but my strength was broken, and there were two witnesses against me. That was sufficient to convict me. In addition, "objective facts" had been established.

And the truth? I had not the courage to fight for truth alone. The NKVD had no interest in it whatever.

I had neither the courage nor the strength to fight for truth for its own sake. Therein lies my crime. Let those who, like me, have been through the NKVD purgatory cast the first stone.

Sylakov

One night, as had often happened to me before, I was fetched from my cell, "with my things". In prison language "with one's things" meant a great deal. It could mean that one was going to be released, or it could mean that one was being taken away to be shot. Generally, however, it merely meant transfer to another cell. Such transfers were important events in the monotony of prison life; they meant new people, new impressions, new knowledge, perhaps even news from "outside". On this occasion I was taken to a cell smaller than my previous cell. It contained two men. They had not yet gone to sleep. One of them, a tall fellow about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, with an athletic figure and a broad, Mongolian face, was named Sylakov. He made not the slightest movement at my entrance, but sat on his bunk in a peculiar position, bent forward, holding out his left hand like a Russian street-beggar. His lips were silently muttering, for when I came in he was engaged in magical incantations. My other cell-mate—a former high official of the NKVD—later told me that for a long time Sylakov had been constantly absorbed in magic, in the hope of alleviating his case.

Sylakov's case was by no means simple or straightforward. He had been a railwayman, employed at Briansk station. His father had been a guard, so he was a genuine proletarian. By nature he was given to wild crazes and flights of the imagination. As a child he had run away from home and wandered about for several years with homeless children, by whom he had been given a thorough grounding in depravity and crime. As he grew up he grew steadier, and went to work. He finished his training school, went to work on the railways, and married. But his career was interrupted by his call-up for military service. As a worker and member of the Communist Youth Organization he was posted to a special unit. It was some kind of frontier detachment, with specially important and secret duties. As a result he came into contact with picked men, reliable Communists and members of the Komsomol, all of working-class origin. His officers were proved Red Army men, all wearers of Bolshevik decorations. Sylakov, with his wild character, found barrack life and discipline difficult to bear, and he could not get used to it. He was unhappy. Then some events occurred which ended by pushing him off his mental balance. News from home grew from bad to worse. His aged mother, to whom he felt a primitive but tender devotion, was taken seriously ill. His young wife, a Komsomol girl and a worker, left him and went to live with a student in Moscow. Sylakov applied for leave. But there is no leave for recruits in the Red Army. He therefore decided to desert.

But soon after his desertion he was overcome with remorse. His deed called for punishment. But if punishment could not be entirely avoided, an attempt could at least be made to make it as mild as possible. At that time a tremendous propaganda campaign was in progress, advocating the confession of guilt by all offenders. The Soviet Government was so humane that it was ready to pardon the most serious crimes, provided repentance was sincere. This referred to criminal offences, towards which Soviet penal policy at that time was relatively mild.

Sylakov decided to benefit from this propaganda stunt and to "volunteer his confession of guilt". To heighten its

effect he invented an anti-Soviet plot in which he himself played a central rôle. He knew that dramatic fantasies of this kind were very much in vogue, and decided to try his luck. The exact nature of the "plot" was not very clear to him, and it was conceived on a very modest scale. The story that he had thought out was that he and two or three friends had planned an armed raid on a post office, to steal money with which to finance a band of political terrorists; but instead he had changed his mind and had decided to volunteer his confession of guilt, throwing himself on the mercy of Soviet justice. His youth and proletarian origin seemed to him sufficient guarantee of a favourable outcome.

When Sylakov reached Kiev he went straight to a telephone box[1] and rang up the NKVD, saying that a deserter and an important political criminal was ready to throw himself into the hands of Soviet justice, and had important secrets to reveal. He then rang off and waited to see what would happen. Half an hour later he was picked up, and then the famous Sylakov case began.

When Sylakov invented his story he could not foresee that the NKVD would invent a "counter-plan", or variation on it, with which he would be compelled to comply. He was taken in the "black raven" straight to the offices of the People's Commissar, where they were waiting impatiently for a criminal of unusual calibre. After a brief, formal questioning, he was subjected to the harshest interrogation. He was kicked around (in prison jargon this treatment was called "football") and beaten up. He was then thrown into his cell, half dead. This process was repeated for many days and nights, until Sylakov's story gradually changed. It was amended and adapted until it reached a form that accorded with NKVD requirements.

The final version, as told me by Sylakov himself, and as confirmed by his comrades, whom I met in various cells, was as follows. It was not just Sylakov himself and two or three friends who had been involved in the plot, but the

[1] The only improbability in this story, in the authors' opinion, is that Sylakov should have found a telephone box in Kiev in working order. But such things did happen.

whole military unit from which he had deserted. The ringleader was not Sylakov, as in the original version, but his commanding officer, aided and abetted by his immediate subordinates. Sylakov himself now played only a minor rôle in the plot, the aim of which was the overthrow of Soviet rule and the restoration of capitalism and autocracy. Some of the plotters had undertaken to carry out terrorist attacks on members of the Soviet Government and the party leaders. Others had divided up the jobs in the future administration. Sylakov himself, for instance, had been picked for the post of Governor-General of Moscow.

All this would have been merely absurd if it had not involved tragedy for so many people. The cells of Kiev prison started gradually filling with prisoners involved in the Sylakov plot. Nearly the whole unit in which Sylakov had served was arrested, from the commanding officer down to the transport drivers. The wives of several officers and Red Army men were arrested too, and so were Sylakov's two sisters, both working-girls, his aged and crippled mother, his father, and his uncle, who was a porter, and had seen his nephew only once in his life. In the course of his interrogation this unfortunate uncle, who had served as a corporal in the Tsarist army, was transformed into a Tsarist general. I am not exaggerating when I say that there was not a single cell in Kiev prison which did not contain someone involved in the Sylakov plot.

The NKVD machinery moved into top gear. Every method of interrogation was employed. In most cases the prisoners did not deny their guilt, particularly the young Red Army men, who were used to strict discipline. The Sylakov plot assumed bigger and bigger proportions, and more and more important people were dragged into it. The officers of the unit all named their seniors as having "recruited" them and their juniors as having been "recruited" by them. Heaven knows how far this might not have gone if it had been left to itself. The whole Red Army, from Voroshilov downwards, might have been involved in this "military-terrorist plot". Instead the whole process suddenly went into reverse. A new political phase began, a phase of "counter-statements" and releases. Why this change

in Soviet policy took place I was for a while unable to decide. But the Sylakov plot seemed to have played a part in it. The absurdities to which the Yezhov methods could lead were becoming clear. There was also a danger that, if the purge had not been called off, there might have been an outburst of public fury and indignation that no methods of intimidation could have suppressed. Even intimidation has its limits.

However that may be, one fine day it was suggested to Sylakov during his interrogation that he should deny everything he had so far confessed and declare the whole plot to be fictitious. Poor Sylakov could not believe his ears. Why had they beaten him so vigorously to extract all those admissions, and why had they encouraged him every time he told a lie and crushed every one of his attempts to tell the truth? At first he thought the new suggestion must be just some new trick on the part of his examining magistrate, so he persisted in maintaining the truth of the Sylakov plot. But he was then subjected to the interrogation methods all over again, and at last he realized that what they said about "counter-statements" was to be taken seriously.

The other Sylakov plotters had the same experience. Sylakov described to me with inimitable humour how anxiously one of his "subverted" comrades had tried to agree with his fairy-story during their first confrontation, though it had implicated him in a serious crime and put him in danger of terrible punishment. At their next confrontation this same Red soldier had been terribly afraid of making a "counter-statement"; afraid, that is to say, of confessing in the presence of an NKVD examining magistrate the falsity of a previous confession of an imaginary crime which had possibly exposed him to the death penalty. What was this? False modesty? Reluctance to confessing to a lie, or lack of courage? Or had severe punishment actually extinguished his instinct of self-preservation? Let us leave these problems to the psychologist. The point is that nearly all those involved in the Sylakov plot behaved in exactly the same way as Sylakov. First they admitted they were involved in it, but later they retracted.

An important detail, as I found out later, after my release, is that Sylakov was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for desertion only. The NKVD had the decency not to punish him for the fairy-tale which had such far-reaching consequences; or they may not have wished to punish the real author.

A new phase had started. The People's Commissar Uspensky, like the "Iron Commissar" Yezhov, disappeared. Their assistants, great and small, went with them. "Denials" and "counter-statements" of one's own confessions and extorted admissions began. The interrogation rooms were much quieter and more peaceful. They were never completely peaceful, either before or after the Yezhov period, but, compared with that stormy time, relative peace and calm prevailed. The methods of interrogation which I have described were not applied so frequently or so systematically, though they were never completely given up. New prisoners from "outside" appeared more and more rarely. Rumours about mass releases found their way into the cells. Hope awoke even in my breast. It was strengthened by the dropping of the espionage charge. Mikhailov had repudiated his earlier statements, though Mokrov stuck to his fantastic story. The charge of anti-Soviet plotting and preparation for revolt was also somewhat toned down. I had reason for hope, and the hope turned out to be justified.

One fine day in the early autumn of 1939 I was fetched from my cell "with my things". It was an unusual time of day for transfer to another cell; instead I was taken to the examining magistrate, who told me I was to be released.

Beforehand I had to undertake never to tell anyone what I had seen and heard during my imprisonment. I am breaking my word. Have I a right to do so? A moral right? My conscience does not reproach me.

The Seksot

The most revolting phenomenon of Soviet life, which gives it a special stamp of its own, is that of the so-called seksot. The seksot is a worker or informer for the secret

police—formerly the GPU, later the NKVD, and now the MVD.

Secret political agents are not a Bolshevik invention. Political espionage, false evidence and faked accusations, even faked self-accusations and false extorted confessions, to say nothing of coercion, were not invented by the Bolsheviks. Bolshevism has merely carried these things to fantastic extremes. That is what they did with the seksots.

It is said that if three Soviet citizens meet, one is a seksot. I do not know if this is true. Perhaps two of them may be seksots; perhaps all three; or this may be an exaggeration. The fact remains that every Soviet citizen at every step, wherever he may be, feels himself under constant observation by the seksots. Subjectively, at any rate, he is never free from this secret observation, at work or in the street or talking to friends or among his family. Moreover, every Soviet citizen knows that his comfort, however limited that may be, his social position, his liberty and his life depend on these seksots. People have grown used to them, and they are regarded as an inevitable, almost natural, evil, like disease germs, or accidents, to which everyone is subject. They constitute the most painful and evil phenomenon in Soviet life, bringing calamity and ruin to everyone alike, to the seksots as well as to their victims.

Who are the people who volunteer for such work? From what social strata and types of human being are they recruited? Their services, incidentally, are not as a rule paid for; they are rendered as a "social duty". Here we must at once distinguish between two different kinds of seksot, the voluntary and the involuntary. The voluntary seksots consist of various types, prominent among whom are vicious, malevolent, morally weak and degenerate people, who are ready to injure their neighbours out of spite, envy, jealousy, selfishness, or any sort of moral perversion. Among them also are some would-be idealists and "busybodies" who are convinced that their activities are somehow useful and indispensable—*ad majorem dei gloriam*—to the greater glory of the world revolution and Soviet power.

But other seksots have their work more or less forced on them by the direct or indirect influence of the machine

whose cogs they become. These, too, are often weak and characterless people, or such as have special reason to be afraid of the NKVD. For the most part they are recruited from the enormous number of people who hope, by working for the NKVD, to win favour with that organization, and believe they will thereby avert the terrible lot of "class enemies". But this is a miscalculation. Not infrequently they are people of special characteristics, such as women and girls of exceptional beauty and spirit, who are subjected to pressure by the NKVD and induced to carry out such tasks, often in the hope of rescuing friends or close relations. The NKVD generally abides strictly by such bargains, at any rate until a new turn of events renders these people's services superfluous, whereupon they are arrested.

Before my release I expected to be tried by a court-martial and was transferred to another cell, where I met a new companion who, like me, was awaiting early trial. He was a man of indeterminate middle age, perhaps in the middle forties. One's first impression was that he was a typical intellectual, such as were frequently to be met with in Soviet prisons at that time. They were known ironically as "Trotskyists".

He proved to be sociable and talkative. He had been in solitary confinement for many months, and was delighted at having someone to talk to. After the usual introductory questions such as: Who are you? How long have you been in prison? What are you charged with, or what article are you charged under? we started really to get to know each other, and soon we felt we were friends. The man was a former engineer, and he told me his story, which was tragic but instructive.

Kovalenko came from a wealthy and intelligent family. After many vacillations and changes of heart, he had at last come to believe firmly and wholeheartedly in Communism. As he himself had had connections with the Whites, and several of his relatives had been White officers, he could not join the party. On the advice of a responsible and respected Communist, he decided to serve the party in another capacity, that of a seksot. This well-known Communist assured him that this was at least as worth while as

being a party member. Indeed, in some respects the position was even more important and responsible.

Kovalenko overcame his moral scruples by the reflection that his new work was justified in the service of the cause—the cause of world Communism. There was actually something alluring, exciting, adventurous, about taking the plunge into collectivist morality and devoting oneself to an ideal. Also it was agreed with his superiors that the seksot's normal work of petty espionage was not to be expected of him. His duties were to be more serious than eavesdropping, or observing the facial expressions of his closest friends. Moreover "Communism could not be built with kid gloves," and *à la guerre, comme à la guerre*. The die was cast, and progress down the slippery slope began.

At first Kovalenko was able to remain true to his conscience. He told no lies in his reports, he bore no false witness against his neighbour and avoided denouncing close friends and acquaintances, that is to say people who trusted him and would have suffered by such an abuse of confidence. He abused no confidences, but merely observed objectively and impartially, and recorded his observations with the detachment and accuracy of a photographic plate. His conscience felt no guiltier than if he had been a photographic plate and, if people suffered as the result of what he recorded, it was their fault, not his, and they had only themselves to blame. He was only doing his duty, and doing one's duty is always pleasurable. When he had occasionally to overcome his own scruples or likes and dislikes in carrying it out, he felt a positive hero.

He was exposed to not a few temptations. Sometimes he would want to protect a friend and whitewash him or keep quiet about something he had said or done, and sometimes the reverse would happen, and he would be tempted to harm someone he disliked by exaggerating some dangerous statement or item of behaviour. There was, therefore, a certain element of subjectivity about the "photographic plate", but this he always tried to combat. During the first phase he was more or less able to reconcile himself to the more unpleasant aspects of his work. But this grew more and more difficult, and he was plunged into more and more

agonizing struggles with his conscience; and it was not always his conscience which won.

His superiors soon ceased to be satisfied with the reporting of objective facts. The kind of thing that his colleagues and friends and acquaintances said in conversation, their discontent with Soviet rule in general and Soviet measures in particular, were well known to the NKVD already. The Bolsheviks have no illusions in this respect. They are too realistic to rely on popular sympathy. Machiavelli and Guicciardini warned them against taking any such risk. What the NKVD required of its secret agents, the seksots, was reports about actions. But Kovalenko was no good at supplying these. His reports were concerned exclusively with people's ideas and feelings, but not with actions. His circle of friends were too frightened to be inclined to counter-revolutionary activity.

Kovalenko did not yet realize that such activity was nearly always invented by the NKVD, that the attempted assassinations, outrages, risings, diversionary activities, etc., were faked, faked by the security police to justify their preventive measures.

In the whole of my long prison career, apart from a few cases of "frontier-jumping" by a few minor Polish or Rumanian agents, I did not come across anything whatever that pointed to the real existence of any kind of counter-revolutionary activity. Factory accidents occurred often enough, and were obviously the result of error or negligence, and often enough explicit warnings against the negligence which caused the accident had been issued by the man subsequently held to be responsible for it. But all the innumerable assassination plots, diversionary activities, blowings-up, etc., had remained at the "attempted" stage. At the last moment something always went wrong. The weather was too wet, or something else intervened.

An unequal battle began between the NKVD, which demanded reports of "actions", and the seksot, who had nothing to report but words. The tragedy was the NKVD's complete lack of interest in the truth. It wanted reports about "actions" without caring in the least whether such reports corresponded with the facts. But the unlucky

seksot insisted on sticking to the facts. His relations with his superiors consequently became increasingly strained. They treated him more and more rudely, and started threatening him. They let him know that he was distrusted, and was actually suspected of being a counter-revolutionary himself. He was aware in his own mind that his rôle had fundamentally changed; he had set out to be a sincere supporter of Communism, but had turned out to be nothing but a common police spy. He would have liked to give up the job, and to accept the consequences, but he lacked the strength. He thought of taking his own life, but was too weak. The easiest way out was to drown his conscience in drink. That was the beginning of his downfall. Henceforward he gradually lost the last vestiges of conscience and feeling for truth.

On the advice of an ingenious NKVD superior, he set to work on "analytical deductions" from the facts. This meant that in his reports he started "interpreting" the things that people said and reading hidden meanings into them. A remark that the shops were empty and that there was nothing to buy would be interpreted as "dissatisfaction with and criticism of the party's economic policy". If someone said anything to a foreigner about Soviet housing conditions it was expanded into espionage, and a man who passed on a joke about Stalin became "the instigator of a terrorist state of mind". Unsuspecting groups of friends and colleagues were transformed into "political groups", "groupings", "organizations", etc. It was merely a matter of altering a few words and phrases here and there, a matter of giving things a different twist. But this process gradually wiped out the distinction between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction. The facts were completely buried in the imagination.

Such "lawyer's methods", however, helped but little. For one thing, the NKVD kept making bigger and bigger demands, and ceased to be satisfied with reports about possibilities and states of mind. It wanted facts about "real" organizations and "real" espionage. For another thing, the people of the Soviet Union were becoming more suspicious and cautious. The effect of perpetual intimidation, and of feeling that seksots were perpetually peering over their

shoulders, made them more and more reserved and taciturn, even in private conversation.

The seksot was thus caught between the Scylla of the more and more demanding and suspicious NKVD and the Charybdis of the utterly intimidated and incredibly cautious Soviet citizen. What was he to do?

The outcome was that the borderline between fact and fiction grew hazier and hazier, and the real was increasingly displaced by the potential. From this point it was but a step to outright invention and lies. Kovalenko now proceeded from "lawyer's methods" to the unrestricted use of his imagination. He gave up worrying about truth, or even its shadow. He merely concerned himself with remaining within the bounds of plausibility. Was it possible for so-and-so, in view of his education, social position, general conduct, past, etc., to have acted or spoken or behaved in such-and-such a manner in such-and-such circumstances? If the answer was yes, that was enough. Whether the man had in fact so acted or spoken was immaterial, and interested neither the seksot nor the NKVD. There were no facts any longer; imagination reigned supreme.

All these inventions, which flowed in from every quarter, were collected by the NKVD, which erected on them the fantastic edifice of anti-Soviet organizations, planned risings, diversionary activities, espionage, sabotage, etc., and all these fantasies were later confirmed by the familiar interrogation methods. Thus did imagination materialize and put on flesh and blood.

Kovalenko's flights of fancy only partly satisfied the NKVD. There still remained limits beyond which he was not prepared to go. These were the limits of inherent plausibility. He insisted on remaining a realist, if only in the artistic sense. Why? He did not know. He had long been convinced that the aim justified the means, but he could not believe that the means that he was now brought up against could be justified by anything, and that was the source of his tragedy.

Kovalenko was unwilling to report to the NKVD revolts and conspiracies which lacked the slightest verisimilitude, and strained relations with his superior officers continued.

So it went on until his arrest, and now he had to do what he had held out against doing for years. He had to confess to the "reality" of all the things he had put down in his reports as merely "potential". From the NKVD point of view Kovalenko had outlived his usefulness. Such is the pitiless law of life.

It is strange that, in spite of the NKVD's inexhaustible appetite for counter-revolutionary "facts", the technique of the *agent provocateur*, as it was exploited at the time of the Tsarist Okhrana, played only an insignificant part. The seksots would frequently, indeed as a matter of course, lead conversation round to disparaging and derogatory remarks about the Soviet régime, to make the people they were watching feel safe, and encourage them to unburden their souls in the true Russian manner. But, in spite of my many years of imprisonment, I did not come across a single example of real *agent-provocateur* technique, *i.e.*, the organization by Government agents of counter-revolutionary activity, assassination plots, etc. Rumour had it that such things were done as having illegal leaflets printed for some of the "show" trials, and there seemed to be signs that that sort of thing became more frequent after the end of the Yezhov period, when the interrogation procedure had relapsed into more normal channels. It sounds paradoxical, but it seems to be a fact that the activities of the *agent provocateur* presuppose the existence of at least the outer framework of a State governed by the rule of law. During the Yezhov period the NKVD had no need whatever laboriously to organize "facts". It was satisfied with the seksots' "legends" and prisoners' subsequent confession. There was no need for facts when paper facts were sufficient. The exceptions mentioned seem only to confirm this theory.

To return to Kovalenko. Did he feel remorse for what he had done? Did he renounce the cause which had led him down the slippery slope? Yes and no. His attitude was roughly this. The road was difficult and frequently dirty, but the existence of the system depended on the use of such means, which were a grim necessity. He acknowledged that the supreme necessity was liberty. Therefore he had nothing to repent, nothing to be sorry for. Would he return to his

work after his release? No, he didn't want to, he was too tired. But, if the Soviet Government demanded it of him, he would be willing.

The loyal or "convinced" Soviet citizen, as he calls himself, may be dissatisfied with Soviet rule and hurt by it, but losing faith in it would mean losing faith in himself. In his faith lies his salvation. Every Communist must sacrifice his conscience, his natural moral feelings, to the Soviet ideal. What would become of a believer in Moloch who lost his faith in his idol after sacrificing his only beloved son to it?

Another seksot whom I met during my pilgrimage through the cells belonged to the category of "has-beens". He had been a deputy Minister in one of the many anti-Soviet Governments in the Ukraine at the time of the civil war. He had therefore had to redeem himself by working as a seksot. But this had not saved him from periodical arrest. He had already been in prison five or six times.

Before his last arrest, in 1937, Matviyevsky had been given a particularly delicate task. He had to report on visits he paid to a number of highly-placed Communists in their homes, the anti-Soviet conversations he had had with them, and the instructions he had received from them for the preparation of anti-Soviet risings, etc. Needless to say, there was no shred of truth in all this, but after his arrest he had had to confirm it all.

This leads us into the workshop of the notorious Soviet "show" trials. The chief characteristic of these is not the exaggerated publicity given to them, or their propagandist purpose, but the fact that the charge against the prisoners has not the remotest connection with the real reason for putting them out of circulation. Its sole purpose is to justify the elimination of political opponents in the eyes of public opinion and to paint them in the blackest possible light for the people and for posterity. The real facts are completely immaterial.

How simple it all was! Ten people such as Matviyevsky would be ordered by the NKVD to declare that some high party official, with those of his colleagues who had been selected for martyrdom with him, had joined them in a

counter-revolutionary plot to prepare for the armed overthrow of the Soviet power or a terrorist attack on Stalin, Voroshilov, etc. In this case the victim, chosen for some inscrutable reason, was Demchenko, secretary of the Kharkov party committee, and other important officials. They were said to have joined in a revolutionary plot with, among others, Matviyevsky, a former associate of Petliura.

On the basis of such secret reports Demchenko and his colleagues would be arrested one night and taken in the "black raven" to the NKVD "inner" prison. To his extreme astonishment this fighter in the October Revolution, companion of Lenin and of Stalin, one of the leading Bolsheviks, would learn that he was no Bolshevik, but a mere member of the "counter-revolutionary rabble", a "rebel" and a "terrorist". Then the interrogation would begin. After eight to ten months of the process, or if necessary nineteen or twenty, he would finally come to trial; and at the trial he would confess, before his people, his party and the whole world, to some crime of the most monstrous, incredible and hair-raising kind, only to be sentenced to the supreme penalty. It made no difference whether he made his confession under the influence of the "chair-leg", as in the cells we all believed, or was sacrificing himself to an "acknowledged political necessity" for the sake of the cause and the power of the Soviet. The result was the same.

The completeness of the prisoners' confessions in Soviet political trials is not easy to understand. The explanation is to be found partly in the psychology of Soviet man. One thing is indisputable; the prisoners' docility in court is not to be explained solely by the impact on them of the interrogation process. It is true that the interrogation methods, particularly when applied for months or years, are capable of breaking the strongest will. But the decisive factor is something else. It is that the majority of convinced Communists must at all costs preserve their faith in the Soviet Union. To renounce it would be beyond their powers. For great moral strength is required in certain circumstances to renounce one's long-standing, deep-rooted convictions, even when these turn out to be untenable. These people, sometimes old revolutionaries who had defied the Tsar, did not

have the strength. The explanation of this remarkable phenomenon, which has led to so many puzzled conjectures, is not secret drugs or even the mysterious tendency of the Russian soul to self-accusation. These people cannot regard themselves as victims of and martyrs to a political enemy. They are the victims and martyrs of their own régime, which they fought for and set up themselves. In the past they may well have been opposed to Stalin and the present leadership, in their own hearts, even if they have never admitted it, but they have made too many compromises with the régime, often perhaps against their better judgment, and shared too much of the guilt for mistakes and acts which they must have come to regard as criminal for them to be able to revolt openly against it.

I was spared having to appear in a "show" trial. The proposed mass trial on a charge of bourgeois nationalism of a number of the highest party officials in the Ukraine, including Postyshev and Kossior, as well as many scholars, scientists and technicians, did not take place. The period of "show" trials was over. They had lost their effect. No one in the Soviet Union had any faith left in the plausibility either of the accusations or the confessions. People had started talking about "witch trials", and even the most faithful and consistent supporters of the Soviet abroad found them exasperating.

Not long afterwards I was released, and was able to return to my family. I was sent to the Crimea to convalesce, and reappointed to my former post. I was received with acclamation by the same students who had so pitilessly criticized me before and after my arrest, and I went back to my lecturing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THEORIES

WERE the prisoners in fact as guiltless as they claimed to be? Under the influence of the long time we spent in Soviet prisons, did we accept too uncritically the prisoners' own view of themselves, and were we influenced by the atmosphere of prison, in which everyone proclaims his own innocence?

We believe we can answer with an easy conscience that we were not. Nearly everyone in prison had some reason to feel guilty. People who felt loyalty to the régime had double reason to do so. Every one of them had at some time co-operated with the system to a greater or lesser extent, minimized in his own mind its mistakes and defects, shut his eyes to accessible facts, tried to justify them against his own better conscience before falling victim to the system himself. This type of guilt-feeling is, as was mentioned above, one of the most important factors explaining the lack of will to resist shown by those most closely associated with the system.

Everyone at some time or other had had doubts about the Communist point of view and expressed them. Everyone had made slips and mistakes which could be regarded as crimes from the point of view of the system.

But we can say with complete confidence that the overwhelming majority of prisoners felt and in fact were as innocent of the crimes with which they were charged as of the crimes to which they confessed. The confessions were almost without exceptions legends.

There was no question that excited the prisoners so much as that which the reader must already have asked himself time and again. Why? What for? The question was endlessly argued in the wooden waiting-cells, the "dog kennels" in which prisoners were put before and after interrogation. The words "Why? What for?" were to be found scratched with a smuggled bit of broken glass on the inside walls of the

prison van, the "black raven", and the coaches of the prison trains. "Why? What for?"

We do not pretend to know. We are not yet far enough away from these events historically, and far too little is still known of the facts, for us to be able to suggest with confidence that any particular answer to that question is correct. We have, for instance, given estimates of the number of arrests, and though we have no doubt that these are of the right dimensions, they remain estimates, and are not based on statistics; and still less is known about what really went on in the highest party circles and about the motives and psychology of the persons concerned.

Instead of one answer we shall therefore give many. We shall present the theories put forward by the examining magistrates and the prisoners themselves. During our imprisonment we tirelessly discussed these theories and tried conscientiously to register them. They were put forward by people of the most varied callings and degrees of education —simple peasants, well-known historians and scholars, implacable enemies of the régime as well as its highest functionaries—party secretaries, People's Commissars and chiefs of the NKVD after their arrest. For prison brought us into contact with all these types, and though some of them, particularly the latter, were extremely reserved, we often established human contact with them and found out their true opinions.

We have recorded altogether seventeen such theories and, with the exception of two, which we have included only for the sake of curiosity, we believe that each of them contains a portion, at the very least a tiny grain, of truth.

We believe that we can best serve truth by recording these theories, together with the objections which can be raised against them. We believe that this will give the reader a not incomplete picture of Soviet life, of the events and circumstances here described, and of the background against which they happened. We believe that we shall thus provide him with an insight, in so far as it is at all possible at the present time, into their real causes and a view of the sociological phenomenon as a whole.

(1) *The Official Theory*

First and foremost we shall describe the official theory in the form in which it was presented to the Soviet public and to the world, as laid down in countless official party documents.

It must be remembered that the official Soviet theory about events always exists in duplicate. One form is intended for public use and is expressed in official announcements. The other, the real theory, representing what the party leaders really think, is only discussed in private by the highest party officials. Party meetings of a more or less exclusive nature take place for this purpose, at which an authorized instructor lays down the party point of view. Thus the real, official theory is only known to members of the Politburo and the inner circles of the party. Between the strictly esoteric theory and doctrine, intended only for the inner circle, and that which is made public and intended for the masses there is a wide range of intermediate variations, intended for different grades of the party hierarchy.

But only the public theory is set down in writing. Only in the rarest instances do documents exist setting forth the real esoteric theory. This is normally only communicated or explained by word of mouth. We have already come across an instance of this in connection with NKVD instructions about methods of interrogation and the categories of arrest. Thus any statement or order can always be explained away afterwards as having represented the private view or initiative of an individual. This is one of the reasons for the flexibility of the Bolshevik system.

It is therefore possible to describe with complete confidence only the doctrine intended for the masses. The esoteric doctrine as circulated in the innermost party circles can only be deduced from statements made by high party officials.

The orthodox theory intended for the public in the first place flatly denies the systematic, mass character of the arrests and our estimate of the extent of forced labour. Figures have, of course, never been published. The number of arrests was minimized, particularly in retrospect, or in

individual cases always explained away by the isolated position of the Soviet Union.

The fundamental tenets of Bolshevism are: (1) that Communism is the inevitable and highest aim of human development; (2) that the path to world Communism and world revolution is *via* the acquisition of power by the proletariat and the dictatorship of the proletariat; and (3) that the chief task of a proletariat which has been victorious in one country is to consolidate its victory and in all circumstances to keep its grip on the power it has acquired.

This last aim justifies any means, though the principle is not, of course, consciously admitted, any more than it has ever been admitted by the Jesuits, to whom the same principle has constantly been ascribed.

Everything is subordinated to the single aim of maintaining power. In the course of time the abstraction, the "proletariat", has been displaced by its leaders, the "party", and the party in turn has been displaced by its leaders, the Politburo.

To retain power the first requirement is party unity, complete discipline, lack of any discussion about the "line" within the party itself. The party's first and foremost demand is faith and blind obedience. But, in contrast to the Nazi system, with its conscious and declared leadership principle—the expression *vozhd* (Führer or leader), for Stalin, cropped up in Soviet terminology in the middle of the thirties and has never since disappeared—the leader is merely the representative of the idea of the proletariat, of the Soviet State and its will. In such circumstances faith and blind loyalty are more important than individual judgment or intellectual conviction. The touchstone of faith is and always has been the absurd, the irrational, indeed the anti-rational. *Credo quia absurdum;* I believe because, not although, it is absurd. During the centuries when the Church was consolidating its power, this was the principle which again and again ensured the triumph of propositions incomprehensible in the light of pure reason. Thus did Athanasianism triumph over Arianism, Diophysitism over Monophysitism. Perhaps the sheer absurdity of the

confessions at the "show" trials is a touchstone of the genuine Communist faith. We never met anyone, even among the orthodox adherents of the "line", who really and seriously believed in these confessions. But the necessity of such trials was passionately defended "for the sake of the masses", for whom this kind of primitive myth was allegedly essential. Similarly no serious Communist, either inside or outside the Soviet Union, has any use for the leadership cult as expressed in the millions of clay busts of the "Leader". But the cult is defended as a means essential to the shaping of "mass opinion".

The theory of "capitalist encirclement", the comparison with a ship upon the high seas, the necessity for iron discipline, are necessary consequences of the propositions that the party's rôle is that of a "locomotive" needed to haul the backward masses, and that it is possible to establish Socialism in a single country, a country that is technically and economically undeveloped.

Experience has shown that sincere conviction and devotion to a chosen ideal do not make ties as strong as fear and terror on the one hand and the struggle for personal advantage and comfort on the other. This explains the constant manifestations of deep and heartfelt distrust felt by the representatives of the Soviet system towards their own supporters. A thoughtful and critical follower may desert the cause, but a follower inspired by blind and uncritical faith, or a careerist interested solely in his advancement, will never do so.

It is clear that the task of retaining power, increasing production, steering the masses into a highly-organized, bureaucratic system, requires a type of man completely different from that required by the conquest of power or the pre-revolutionary struggle against oppression. This provides the tragic explanation of Vergniaud's celebrated phrase, which we have already quoted, about the revolution devouring its own children.

The above is roughly the defence of the system repeatedly put forward by honest and convinced supporters of the system to justify everything that takes place under it. It acknowledges the possibility of individual acts of injustice, but maintains that these have to be accepted. "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," these people say. The important factor in their eyes is the victory of Communism over a sixth of the surface of the earth.

The really important factor, however, is the victory of theory over fact, of fiction over reality; the victory of words. Facts are reinterpreted according to what they ought to be in theory, and not taken for what they are. The decisive factor in the triumph of Christianity may have been the consoling prospect of a better hereafter, of a Kingdom not of this world, but the essential content of the Soviet faith is the hope of better things in this life, not to-day, but to-morrow, in a few years' time, after the completion of this Five-Year Plan or a succeeding one; at latest all ideals will be realized in time for the coming generation to reap the benefit. The greatest attention is in fact devoted to youth and to the education of children; young people often feel that the Soviet State is their State.

Nevertheless all this is only insecurely anchored in the hearts of the people, or so the supporters of the system argue. Bolshevism still has many enemies in the most varied sections of the population. There are many reasons for this: prejudice, old custom, dislike of innovation, attachment to land and property, particularly on the part of the peasants, and the memory of many lost advantages, not only in pre-Revolutionary times, but in the years 1925–28, which everybody regards as having been years of prosperity and freedom. In nearly every case this hostility is blind and instinctive, positively primitive. Also a State whose economy is completely nationalized really has more secrets to guard than a capitalist State, for the State is the only employer, and all the things which in a capitalist State are regarded as business secrets have in the Soviet Union to be kept as State secrets, including the statistics of civilian production. This explains the exaggerated fear of espionage. The official theory of the events of the Yezhov period is that they constituted a "cleansing", a cleansing of non-Soviet elements belonging to the past or to the period of the revolutionary struggle for power.

But—and this is one of the critical weaknesses of the

Soviet system which is very easily overlooked—the "cleansing" itself unquestionably made more enemies of the régime than it removed. Not only had the prisoners, even after their release and restoration to their former posts, become at least potential enemies of the régime, but all their relatives and friends, being aware of their innocence, must have been turned against it, or at least had doubts sown in their mind.

The indoctrination of youth, the party teaching, works in the same direction. It by no means always achieves its intended aim. Instead it undoubtedly causes the broadest circles of the population to think about the social consequences of individual measures, such as the introduction of work-books or the abolition of the worker's freedom to choose a job. In our opinion this has done much to contribute to the people's real political maturity.

Finally, reading the classics of the Revolution, Marx, Engels, Lenin and the Russian nineteenth-century Liberals such as Nekrassov and Chernyshevsky, leads young people continually to draw comparisons with Tsarist times and acquaints them with the ideals of European Socialism in the period before the Soviet victory. This provides one of the reasons for our belief that the remarkable events of the Yezhov period were not a unique episode in Soviet history, but a necessary consequence of the form taken by the régime. We believe that such crises, with all their consequences, must either constantly recur, or there must be a complete change in the course, and possibly in the structure, of the régime—perhaps after Stalin's death, during the struggle for power which is bound to follow among his successors.

The official theory explains away the undeniable excesses of the purge exactly as it explained away those of the mass collectivization process. It ascribes them to excess of zeal on the part of local party and NKVD officials. In defence of this explanation it quotes a number of "show" trials of examining magistrates (which in fact took place after the end of the Yezhov era), of course without admitting that the actions for which they were condemned were typical and universal.

This leads us to a few variations on the orthodox theme. They were put to us by representatives of the régime in confidential conversations, but can certainly not be described as entirely official.

(2) *The "Fascist" Theory*

The commonest theory prevailing among orthodox Communists or, to put it differently, among the Soviet "faithful", was an extremely naïve one. It was simply that Fascists had wormed their way into the NKVD organization, or into the supreme party leadership, with the aim of disrupting the Soviet system from within. This was a very convenient theory from the point of view of Communist security, and it was even given official blessing as a way of explaining away official "excesses". It was convenient to be able to shift the responsibility on to "enemy" shoulders. After the sudden disappearance of Yezhov, the "Iron Commissar", he was said to have been either mad or a counter-revolutionary, and thus all his crimes and excesses were explained. His disappearance, with his whole staff, may have been necessary to lend colour to this story.

One of us had an interesting experience in this connection after his release. He happened to be acquainted with the widow of Bronevoy, a former NKVD deputy People's Commissar in the Ukrainian Republic, who died under interrogation by the NKVD. His widow, Helene Lobachova, was a party member and editor of a Soviet periodical.

Until 1937 she was an instructress for the party central committee—a very high position for a woman. As the holder of this position and the wife of a prominent party official she had first-hand knowledge of a group of important party officials who fell victim to the purge. After her husband's arrest she was arrested too. Her son went to live with his grandmother and attended the same school as the son of one of us. Both being regarded as children of "enemies of the people", they were drawn together, and this was the basis of our subsequent friendship.

Mrs. Bronevoy was subjected to every stage of the interrogation process, and as a result suffered permanent injury to the kidneys and several broken ribs. But her spirit

was not broken, and she declined to compose any "legend" to incriminate herself—less, she said, from any aversion to lying than from lack of imagination.

She was released in 1939, when the purge was subsiding and many releases took place. She was also rehabilitated as a party member and actually given a more important position than she had held before. She became the deputy chairman of the Ukrainian broadcasting committee, a post roughly equal in rank to that of deputy People's Commissar. This must have been intended either to compensate her for the wrongs she had suffered or to buy her off as a witness. Immediately after her release she was sent to an excellent convalescent home in the Caucasus at State expense.

She was an orthodox Communist, one of the genuine idealists, of whom so few survived. Her faith was shaken neither by her husband's violent death nor by her own sufferings at the hands of the NKVD. She did not doubt for a moment that everything to which she had been subjected, all the NKVD abuses which she had seen, were the result of the work of enemies, "Fascists, Hitlerites, class enemies, agents of foreign capitalism". She wrote a letter to this effect to Stalin, and simultaneously made an official complaint to Vyshinsky, the Public Prosecutor of the Soviet Union.

The further course of events seemed to confirm her suspicions. At the beginning of 1941 the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union tried her examining magistrates, and she herself appeared as a witness. The magistrates were sentenced to from three to five years' imprisonment for having used torture. Mrs. Bronevoy was triumphant, not at having avenged herself, for she was far too sweet-natured for that, but because justice had been done. Her faith in the Soviet Union was greater than ever, for its enemies had been punished.

On June 22nd, 1941, the Germans invaded Russia. During the night of June 24th Mrs. Bronevoy was arrested again and disappeared for ever. Her excessive love of justice may have been responsible. We had repeatedly tried to convince her of the futility of complaining to Stalin and the

Public Prosecutor, but nothing in the world could shatter her touching faith in justice.

(3) *The Labour Force Theory*

This was another "unofficial" theory put about by loyal Communists. It was characteristic of the explanations they produced privately to explain the fantastic number of arrests. In prison this theory was one of the most popular of all. It explained the arrests as merely a means of procuring labour for the industrial development of large areas of the Soviet Union, remote areas in particular. In spite of the offer of bonuses and privileges of various kinds, it was alleged to have been impossible to find a sufficiently large labour force for the development of these areas, which made terrible demands on the individual. It was the duty of every Soviet citizen to make all the sacrifices demanded of him by the Soviet State, but, since the masses were not sufficiently willing to sacrifice themselves, the State was compelled from time to time to resort to harsh measures, such as these mass arrests. The completion of such projects as the White Sea Canal and the Moskva-Volga Canal, and the releases and decorations awarded in connection with these achievements, showed that the Soviet Government was capable of suitably acknowledging the sacrifices involved.

Many prisoners found this theory useful in reconciling themselves to their fate and harmonizing it with their Soviet convictions. This explained its wide circulation, though it left many questions unanswered. Why, for instance, were the innumerable people doing such work not extolled as heroes instead of being denounced as "enemies of the people" and counter-revolutionaries?

Another consideration was that all those who had been in labour camps unanimously agreed that, in spite of the enormous amount of work demanded of each individual, as exemplified by the high "norms" to which they were subjected, the productivity of forced labour was incomparably lower than that of free labour, even under Soviet conditions, and leaving out of account the manpower absorbed by the NKVD in arresting, interrogating and guarding the prisoners. Also, if this theory were correct, it would be

difficult to understand why the Soviet Government, whose greatest need was highly-qualified workers, should employ engineers and skilled workers, whose training had involved immense expense, at unskilled labour instead of at their own jobs.

(4) *The Job Theory*

Another popular theory was that the purge was to be explained by reasons which were as unknown to the examining magistrates as they were to the prisoners themselves. Obviously they were known to the supreme leaders of the party, but they were known to them alone. One had no right to enquire what they might be, and to do so was a sign of un-Soviet thinking. The Soviet citizen must have confidence in the party leadership, which must have good grounds for not announcing the reasons for the measures it took. But to doubt them was criminal and unworthy of a Soviet citizen.

This was a real expression of the Communist outlook. It reflected a fundamentally religious attitude. When faced with insoluble problems and torturing doubts the most comfortable course was to take shelter in the infallibility of the party and the inscrutability of its ways. The Soviet citizen, the orthodox Communist, takes shelter behind the belief, which has been hammered into him from his earliest youth, that everything the party does is good and right. This is exactly the spirit of the late scholastics. A great deal of Soviet man's behaviour is to be explained by this deification of the party.

The analogy to the Book of Job is obvious. In fact, a not infrequent variation of this theory, which we may call the Job theory, explicitly expressed the belief that the purpose of all these sufferings, the reasons for which were known only to the head of the Government, was that they were to be a test for true believers in the Soviet régime, and would therefore lead to release.

(5) *The Theory of Social Prophylaxis*

The next theory illuminates, not only the methods of the Yezhov period, but the whole Communist security and penal system. It is in wide circulation throughout the Soviet Union, particularly in NKVD circles, and it can definitely be included among the esoteric interpretations of the Communist system. It may provide the best explanation of the whole system of government. It is the theory of social-political preventive measures, *i.e.*, social prophylaxis.

This theory was confidentially explained to one of us by Prygov, a former head of an NKVD section. Prygov's personality is worth a few words to itself. He had had the reputation of being a particularly brutal examining magistrate. Many stories were told about his brutality, and we therefore watched him carefully, to see whether there were any traces in his behaviour of the sadism attributed to him, and to try to solve the problem, not only of his own cruelty, but of that of many of his colleagues. The impression he made, however, was that he was a simple man, though very nervous—obviously as a result of years of strenuous night work—and he turned out to be kind and gentle to the point of sentimentality. He was touchingly concerned about the fate of his father and his sister—he was unmarried—and his manner to his cell-mates was helpful and friendly, though there were outspoken enemies of the régime among them, including former landowners and officers, to say nothing of a real Polish agent, who admitted having crossed the frontier to spy.

Prygov's chief characteristic was the complete orthodoxy of all he said and thought. His behaviour, even in prison, was in exact accordance with what his position required of him; one was not safe from seksots anywhere, even in a prison cell, and as former chief of the first section of the NKVD he knew that very well indeed. He was the typical orthodox type, a believer with no doubts or hesitations. The secret of his cruelty, like that of most of his colleagues, lay in his complete faith in the party line, its correctness and scientific accuracy, and in his unlimited devotion to the party leaders and their representatives. The party line had displaced his conscience and his reason. Semyon Lvovich Prygov was a typical representative of a special kind of real Soviet man. We shall have more to say later about this type, which is the result of "selection" by Soviet conditions

and is not, in our opinion, a product of the Russian national character or an example of special individual wickedness.

We feel that we ought here to draw a contrast between the typical NKVD official and the corresponding representative of the Nazi system. The Belsen trial and the fantastic inhumanity of Nazism are still fresh in the world's memory. How did the accused try to justify themselves? By pleading that they were carrying out orders. They were subject to military discipline and had merely carried out the orders of their superior officers. They denied having opinions of their own or having made decisions for themselves. Prussian military discipline had turned them into automatons, blind executors of the orders of others.

What would a Prygov say if he were required to defend himself in a court of law? He would not, we believe, refer to superior orders, but to the teachings of Marxism and Leninism as he understood them. Prygov was as loyal and obedient as an SS man. But his faith was founded on a conviction that it fully accorded with the demands of reason and conscience. He was fully convinced that his was no blind faith, but was founded on science and logic. He was brutal because the general line required him to be brutal. The general line, so long as it accorded with the fundamental tenets of Marxism, was everything to him. Without the allegedly scientific foundation of the general line, which was the backbone of his faith, all the instructions of the party authorities would have lost their significance for him. He was convinced of the logical and ethical correctness of his Marxist principles, and on this conviction his faith depended.

It seems to us so important to obtain a real insight into the psychology of this type of senior NKVD official, which forms the real backbone of the régime, that we propose to contrast the character of Prygov with that of another important official, M. L. Timoshenko, former chief of the foreign section of the NKVD of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. An additional reason for doing so is that the two men, though entirely different in type, both explained the purge by the "prophylaxis" theory.

Timoshenko had played a certain part in Soviet diplomatic relations. In the twenties, though he was a Commissar of what was then the GPU, he had served as Soviet consul in Lvov under another name, and a White Russian *émigré* had made an attempt to assassinate him. His secretary had been killed, and the incident had caused a stir all over the world. He was better educated than Prygov, and a man of much greater intelligence. He was entirely orthodox and devoted to the party line, but with a touch of liberalism and independence of the kind sometimes called "cardinals' scepticism". He was a decent and honourable man, with a high degree of inner discipline. We do not know whether as an examining magistrate he had indulged in beatings, as Prygov certainly had—he did not deny it—but if party discipline had required it of him he would have done so. He would have done so reluctantly, not with Prygov's conscientious zeal, but he would not have disregarded orders.

Prygov had confessed to counter-revolutionary activity, conspiracy and espionage, as he had been required to do, and he had done so without particular pressure. He maintained that his superiors knew him and his work well enough, and if the party and the NKVD now required him to confess to such things, they must have good reason for what they were doing. His duty as a loyal Soviet citizen was not to withhold the confession required of him.

Timoshenko, however, stubbornly held out against the interrogation process. He declined to compose a self-accusation and racked his brains to find the "objective reasons" for his arrest. He was of impeccable social origin, a worker's son, and was related to Molotov's wife, Zhemchuzhina, but even this had not saved him.

The "objective reasons" naturally existed. He had been secretary of his NKVD party cell. In the NKVD, unlike other bodies, this naturally included practically the whole of the staff. The official theory required him to be a strict guardian of the party line. But there had been a dispute over some minor matter between the party and the People's Commissariat. The party was theoretically senior to all other organs of the State, but in practice even the party had to

accommodate itself to the organ which for the time being embodied the Government's intentions. Timoshenko, as an incorruptible Communist, had placed the party above the NKVD. He was not, of course, punished for this; indeed, at the time he had even had his way, but his conduct had not been forgotten. The time came when his "leftist deviation" was recalled, and he was unmasked as a plotter. He was said to have been recruited as a Polish spy during his service as Soviet consul abroad, and we do not know what became of him.

But Timoshenko, like Prygov, explained the purge by the theory of social prophylaxis. Arrested NKVD officials were particularly fond of this theory, which could be used to justify anything, and left the individual plenty of scope for feeling he was an innocent victim without being forced to damn the system as a whole.

It was argued that, while in the bourgeois world the penal code was concerned only with criminal acts, the young, still growing Soviet State, in danger from within and without, was compelled to protect itself against potential crime and law-breaking and "criminal states of mind". The punishment of potential crime was as justifiable as the punishment of actual crime. Indeed, it was better, because, as in the case of disease, prevention was better than cure.

According to this theory, if a man was known to be suffering from incurable kleptomania, there was no point in waiting for him to steal. It was better to rid the community of him beforehand, and so prevent the crime. In the political sphere a parallel was provided by the "embryonic organization". Friends, all sharing a similar outlook, might meet, perhaps for a glass of tea or to refresh old memories. But then they started criticizing the Government, airing their feelings and exchanging jokes about the Soviet. No crime had been committed, but their meeting pointed to the existence of an anti-Soviet frame of mind, which might develop into a readiness to commit a crime; from readiness to execution was but a tiny step, particularly in times of real or alleged external danger. Was it not better and wiser in such circumstances to protect the State from the activity of such criminal elements and to rid the community of the

potential plotters by prompt intervention of the security organization?

Potential spies, potential terrorists and potential counter-revolutionary agitators should all be similarly dealt with. To protect the State in times of crisis it was therefore perfectly normal, just and reasonable that, over and above the thousands of real political criminals and opponents of the régime, millions of potential criminals should be arrested by the security authorities.

The practice of social prophylaxis therefore consisted, not so much in the discovery and punishment of crime, as in the identification of those groups in which there prevailed a politically dangerous mood, a potentially dangerous frame of mind or an actual preparedness to commit political crime. Those were the three stages which must precede the actual committing of a crime.

Identification of these groups and of the state of mind prevailing in them was carried out in the first place by the seksots. The second line of defence was provided by the often quoted "objective characteristics". The whole population was constantly sifted and checked by the authorities in regard to social extraction, former work, family and friendly relationships, degree of education and attitude towards the party. Thus there arose the already mentioned "categories", *i.e.*, groups of people among whom, according to this theory, the development of a hostile attitude was to be expected. When one knew that there was a high degree of probability that a whole group of people already contained elements hostile to the State, or contained the germ of such elements, it was best to isolate the whole group and render it harmless.

A less orthodox variation of this theory explained why the purge worked special havoc among the old stalwarts of the party, particularly in the Comintern and among foreign Communists. The change in foreign policy which ultimately led to the pact with Hitler could not be admitted, but had no doubt already been discussed by the supreme party leadership. Such a change was bound inevitably to encounter resistance in such circles, and to lead to the growth of opposition. It was therefore necessary as an act of social prophylaxis to liquidate them, to nip any possible resistance in the

bud. We even met prisoners who were prophesying the Hitler pact in 1938, simply on the basis of the "categories" which had been arrested.

The potential "criminality" of a group having once been established, arrests of members of the categories concerned systematically began. The object of the preliminary investigation and interrogation was not the discovery of crime or the subsequent proof that it had been committed, but simply and solely the gaining of additional information about the group among whom the "criminal" state of mind prevailed —the group which could be regarded as fertile soil for the growth of potential opposition. Evidence for this was the fact that far more stress was laid during interrogation on the two questions: "Who recruited you?" and "Whom did you recruit?" than on the actual contents of the prisoner's "legend", to which no one paid very much attention. The chief object of NKVD interest was people and the relations between them, not what they said they had done.

The object of securing a confession was thus merely retrospectively to create a legal pretext, a justification for the arrest according to the letter of the criminal law. For this purpose the prisoner's potential crime had to be turned into a "real" one, and this was provided by the "legend" required of him and usually supplied.

The Russian word *oformlenie* ("formalizing", "regularizing") plays a characteristic and enormously important part in Soviet life. After deciding what you are really going to do, you have to consider how to give it a correct and legal form. A factory, for instance, finds itself in need of a quantity of wire. It may be available in the shops or on the market, but there is none in the factory stores, and to order it from the manufacturer would be pointless, for delivery would take years. The factory cannot buy from the shops, which in a planned economy exist to serve the people and are not allowed to supply factories, and in any case there is a turnover tax of several hundred per cent on the retail price. But the factory needs the wire and has the money to pay for it, and it has every intention of buying it. The problem of *oformlenie* therefore arises, the problem of finding a correct and legal procedure to cover the purchase.

The solution of this sort of production problem is one of the chief tasks of a very large number of people in the State-directed economy. Managers and chief accountants, heads of planning departments and trade union leaders spend hours racking their brains over such teasers. Finally a way out is found. A number of workers or clerks are credited with overtime which they have not worked, and the money is used for buying the wire in the shops. A correct procedure has been found and appearances have been satisfied.

From this point of view confession and conviction are merely *oformlenie*, the provision of apparently legal pretexts for politically necessary actions. The realization that his confession is required as a legal *oformlenie* to justify steps which the Government and the party have decided to take makes it infinitely easier for a prisoner, at least in so far as he is a typical Soviet man, to submit to the necessity. It also enables him to hope that later on, when the reasons for distrusting the group of people to which he belongs has disappeared, he will be rehabilitated and be able to return to normal life. Releases in fact took place without any legal difficulty. Prisoners were sometimes asked to withdraw their confessions, sometimes not. Also it was always astonishing to see how quickly and easily Soviet man appeared to be able to forgive and forget.

In our chapter on interrogation methods we discussed the question of why it seemed to be so essential to the Soviet régime to justify the arrests by confessions, and why it did not choose the more straightforward and probably more honest methods of the French Revolution, whose victims were guillotined under a simple "law against suspects". But forms had to be preserved, and the fiction of the State governed by the rule of law had to be rigorously maintained in the eyes of the public, both at home and abroad. The legal conscience of the NKVD itself would not have permitted an open admission that what it did was done in the name of social prophylaxis. Its actions had to be legalized.

Soviet ideology by no means repudiates the use of revolutionary terror. Marxist criticism of the Paris Commune of 1871, for instance, attributes its failure to the fact

that revolutionary terror was not exercised. No Communist has ever thought of apologizing for the Red Terror in the first phase of the Revolution and of the civil war. But there was no room for Red terror in the present phase of Soviet development, the phase of the Stalinist democratic constitution. That is what the practice of social prophylaxis would have been regarded as if it had been openly admitted.

(6) *The Snowball Theory*

We have already explained how every prisoner was required to incriminate others, and how the process snowballed until the number of candidates for arrest was only limited by the size of the population, which was not, after all, infinite. A theory popular in the cells attributed the size of the purge solely to the automatic working of the denunciation system.

The advocates of this theory maintained that the purge had not originally been intended to be particularly big, but had acquired its mass character from the sheer automatic momentum of the denunciation process, embracing ever wider and wider circles of the population.

It is possible that some arrests may have been due to nothing but the "snowball" process, but to us this theory seems far too superficial; it ignores altogether the motives behind the purge. It does not explain why the incrimination of others was required of every prisoner. The amount of incrimination required, though it varied according to circumstances, was definitely prescribed in each individual case. The story of Sylakov provided an instructive illustration. The theory seems to us to confuse the symptoms with the disease, though it undoubtedly contains a particle of truth.

(7) *The "Plan and Counter-Plan" Theory*

The whole economic life of the Soviet Union, and indeed its cultural life as well, is strictly regulated by Government planning. The so-called technique of "plan and counter-plan" plays an important part in this. The authorities at each level receive a plan from above, which is ultimately communicated to the masses in the form of the task expected

of every single worker or employee. The latter reply by volunteering to undertake more than the plan requires of them. In theory they do so spontaneously. The offer then passes up through the usual channels, and comes back again in the form of a more ambitious plan, which attempts to establish as a "norm" for everybody the output previously volunteered in individual cases only. The game then starts all over again. These tactics have proved very effective, at any rate for propaganda purposes.

A theory not uncommon among the prisoners was that cleansing the country of its political enemies was, as an essential part of Soviet life, as much subject to planning as steel production, the sowing of wheat, or the activities of a symphony orchestra. The size of the purge was just a result of this game of planning and counter-planning carried on between the chiefs of the NKVD and their underlings. We do not, however, believe that large-scale plans existed governing the number of arrests to be made. But the value put on the work of individual NKVD officers at the "criticism and self-criticism" meetings may well have depended on the number of "enemies of the people" they unmasked, and the excessive zeal of examining magistrates and their seniors unquestionably contributed substantially to swelling the number of arrests. Several senior NKVD officials, for instance the chief of the NKVD administration of the town of Poltava, incidentally confirmed this. The need of labour for building and industrial projects may in some cases have played a part in causing arrests to be planned. But we do not believe that the purge was to be attributed to any extent to "planning and counter-planning", a theory which seems to us to be as superficial as the last one, and to confuse cause with effect.

As we learned from conversations with a number of arrested NKVD officials, arrests were planned as follows. The NKVD files covered practically the whole population, and everyone was classified in categories. Thus statistics were available in every town showing how many former Whites, members of opposition parties, people with connections with foreign countries, etc., were living in them. All incriminating material collected by the seksots and gathered

from prisoners' confessions was also entered in the files, and each person's card was marked to show how dangerous he was considered; this depended on the amount of suspicious or incriminating material appearing in his file. As the statistics were regularly reported to higher authority, it was possible to arrange a purge at any moment, with full knowledge of the exact number of persons in each category. An official who succeeded in "unmasking as enemies of the people" persons who had previously been only slightly incriminated, or not incriminated at all, could count on praise and promotion, particularly if a large-scale purge happened to be in progress and his victims were highly placed.

(8) *The Retribution Theory*

Before proceeding to the discussion of theories which involve serious criticism of the Soviet system, we propose to mention, more for the sake of completeness than anything else, and also for the reader's amusement, two extremely strange theories—the retribution theory and the sunspot theory.

We also mention them to illustrate the lengths to which loyal Soviet citizens could go before daring to doubt the decency and justice of the Soviet régime. According to the retribution theory, every political prisoner in the Soviet gaols was atoning for some personal sin. His arrest came like a stroke of fate to remind him of it. The offence he was charged with had, of course, nothing whatever to do with his sin, but no man was completely innocent, and a thorough examination of his conscience would make his personal guilt clear. The originator of this theory was a cell-mate, one Ivan Nikiforovich, by trade a cobbler. He was accused of espionage, because he had a brother living in Poland. He was profoundly convinced that his arrest had come in retribution for the romantic adventures of his youth. Ivan Nikiforovich was concerned with the eternal problem of sin and expiation, but had not read Dostoievsky.

(9) *The Sunspot Theory*

This theory, as its name implied, attributed all the events of the Yezhov period to an increase in the number of

sunspots. Its most charming feature was that it originated with a former president of the International League of the Godless. He was the aged peasant, Ivan Naumovich Dubovoy, whom we have mentioned before. He was a typical representative of the "Old Guard", had been a party member since 1903, had met Lenin, and had been a Red Partisan in the civil war. His son was a senior staff officer on the staff of the commander of the Kharkov military district. He was a good and honest man. There was a religious fervour about his atheism, the exaggerated fervour of the neophyte. He could not understand what was going on around him, and the only explanation that he, the rationalist, could think of was sunspots, about which he had read in a popular magazine. Typical of his delicacy of feeling was that, after buying the little things which prisoners could obtain from the canteen, he always gave most of his purchases away to cell-mates who had no money. To spare them the humiliation of accepting charity, he always asked them to do little services for him in return, such as sewing on a button or the like, so that they could feel they had earned what he gave them.

(10) *The Theory of the Israelites in the Wilderness*

The Book of Exodus relates how the children of Israel, after being led from bondage in Egypt by Moses, spent forty years in the wilderness before they were allowed to catch a glimpse of the Promised Land. The Bible describes in detail how the Israelites hungered and revolted in the wilderness, and asked to be led back to the fleshpots of Egypt.

But forty years had to pass, a whole generation had to die, the memory of Egypt had to be blotted out before they could enter the Promised Land.

Many were reminded of this story as they reflected on their fate in Soviet prisons. The pre-Revolutionary era was Egypt, the land of bondage. The Promised Land was Socialism, the classless society. It seemed doubtful, perhaps, whether the Promised Land of which the Jews had dreamed had really been so much better than Egypt, and Moses seemed to have been actuated by profound wisdom when he allowed the land of their dreams to be seen only by those

who had hungered in the wilderness. Looking at each of the categories of prisoner as we have described them in an earlier chapter, it was impossible not to be struck by the profundity of the comparison. Was it not those who had known the past, those who had dreamed the dream of the Promised Land, the dream of freedom, who were now forbidden to compare the real Canaan of Socialism either with the fleshpots of Tsarism or with the stuff of their dreams? Was there not in those accursed capitalist countries beyond the frontier, where a decaying bourgeoisie was ripening towards its own destruction, another Egypt, which had been seen by all foreigners, former prisoners of war and those who had travelled abroad, and could be described by them to their fellow citizens, suggesting dangerous comparisons with the real Canaan, the land of Socialism, which by definition had been attained at the end of the second Five-Year Plan?

We do not believe that all this was erected into a conscious, rational principle, clearly formulated by the Communist leaders. We do not believe that attempts were really made systematically to remove those who could bear witness, not only to life as it had been, but to the original impulse which had caused the people to abandon the old and seek the new. But we do suggest that it contributed powerfully, if perhaps unconsciously, to the course of events. This theory incidentally arose out of discussions between a historian who had once been a priest and a foreign scientist who had come to the Soviet Union to help with the construction of Socialism.

Before his arrest this same scientist had once expressed to his Russian colleagues his surprise at the great dividing line which separated him from the Russians, who seemed to him to speak an intellectual language entirely different from that of himself and his friends. But he had then realized that the dividing line was not between himself and the Russians, but between the Russians who had lived abroad and those who had not. The regrettable feature was that Stalin belonged to the second group.

(11) *The Whipping-boy Theory*

The whipping-boy theory was also told us by a priest. He reminded us of the story of Jonah, who was thrown into the sea, not because he was guiltier than his companions but because the lot fell upon him.

The Soviet system had brought endless suffering to the Russian people, in his opinion. He recalled the two great famines of 1921 and 1933, the millions of dead and the enormous reservoir of hatred and longing for revenge that must have been stored up in the people's mind and must be demanding an outlet. The rulers could only maintain themselves in power by providing the people with scapegoats, and offering them hecatombs of victims on whom to vent their rage.

The chief victims of the purge, he pointed out, were those who had had the management of the country in their hands during the famine years. He recalled the "show" trials which had followed every large-scale failure, the overhasty industrialization and the violent collectivization of the land. The accused in all these trials had always confessed to having tried deliberately to cause the failure in question. We have already repeatedly pointed out that political or economic setbacks, which were obviously traceable to specific Government policies, were subsequently invariably attributed to deviations by subordinates from the party line. This happened at the "industrial party" trials at the end of the twenties, and after the 1933 famine. It also happened at the trials of NKVD examining magistrates after the end of the Yezhov purge, which had claimed as many victims as a natural catastrophe. According to this theory the Kirov murder was a warning signal that the people, though they had recovered from the 1933 famine, had not forgotten it, and that they remembered that the famine had been caused, not by drought, but by the violent collection of the 1932 harvest and the social and economic measures the Government had taken in connection with it. To assuage the resulting popular hatred, the Government (or rather the supreme leadership of the party, for practically no-one else in the Government apparatus survived) sacrificed the entire body of higher and middle-rank officials. The trials

were intended to show that the "excesses" of collectivization, and hence the famine, had indeed been caused artificially, but by the allegedly so powerful Fascist-Trotskyist-Rightist *bloc*, with the aim of annihilating the Soviet people.

One weakness in this theory, which undoubtedly contains a good deal of truth, is that it provides no explanation for the mass nature of the purge or for a number of important categories of prisoners, such as people having connections with foreign countries, and former landowners.

(12) *The Party-Struggle Theory*

This theory was often supported by former Mensheviks, Bukharinists and Trotskyists, and was as follows. Stalin had emerged as victor in the internal party struggle which had followed Lenin's death. He owed his triumph, not to support of his line by the bulk of party members, but solely to the fact that he had broken with the methods of internal party democracy. In his capacity as head of the party administration he had gained control of the whole apparatus, and had succeeded by intrigues of every kind in filling every key post with his own friends and supporters. He owed his triumph purely to this introduction of police methods into internal party discussion. He was further accused of having no firmly based and consistent theoretical line of his own; his party line was said to be merely the consolidation of his own power and that of his clique, and it was said to swing violently and in a purely opportunist manner from one extreme to the other.

It was pointed out that he had liquidated the opposition several times before, both from the left and from the right, but this had not prevented him from subsequently adopting their policies as his own; this had happened both in respect of industrialization and collectivization on the one hand, and the introduction of the free kolkhoz market on the other.

In spite of all his intrigues, however, he had not succeeded in winning over the party masses to his side, let alone the mass of the people who had carried out the Revolution. After the famine he had realized the insecurity

of his position in the State and in the party, and he had had no alternative but virtually to liquidate the Soviet system while nominally retaining it and replacing it with a totalitarian-Fascist régime. To achieve this, however, the first necessity had been to liquidate the Communist Party itself. But to have liquidated it formally would have been equivalent to an open *coup d'état* and, among other things, would have forfeited the sympathy of the working-classes abroad, who clung to the name and symbol of Communism. He therefore chose instead to liquidate the personnel of the party and systematically to replace it by a compact and disciplined organization, consisting of people who were united, not by ideals and personal conviction, but only by the power he put into their hands. The alterations that had come about in the Soviet system were compared with the Thermidor phase of the French Revolution, and a new ruling class was said to have emerged which was using the bureaucratic apparatus of the State to exploit the people in an unprecedented fashion.

One variation of this theory interpreted the murder of Kirov as a warning signal, showing how little the youth of the party was in sympathy with the leadership.

Other supporters of this theory claimed excellent authority for saying that as early as 1934 Stalin had been called on to resign by a majority decision of the party Central Committee. His intended successor as secretary of the party—which was the only official position then held by Stalin—had been Kirov, and Kirov had been murdered at Stalin's instigation just at the time when he should have handed over office to him.

It is of course impossible to-day to verify the accuracy of either of these stories. But the party-struggle theory is undoubtedly correct in several essential particulars. There is no question but that the face of the Soviet State changed as fundamentally during the years of Stalin's control as did that of the party. In the light of this theory the Soviet régime's deep inner distrust of genuine conviction or any kind of idealism becomes immediately intelligible. It explains quite naturally the mass character of the régime's counter-measures, it is completely consistent with

innumerable individual incidents that occurred, and its essential points are an indispensable ingredient, as we shall see, in all the critical theories still to be dealt with.

This theory, however, in the form in which we have here presented it, seems to us to magnify the personality of Stalin to an altogether unwarranted degree. The picture of him that emerges is too close to be in focus. He, and he alone, is regarded as the villain of the piece. We do not believe that Stalin, however subtle an intriguer he may have been, could have "swindled" and "sneaked" himself into power if decisive social forces had not been at work to guarantee his success. It is interesting to note that the story of Hitler's seizure of power in Germany was attributed to similar intrigue; Hitler was also accused of having "sneaked" his way into power. But the history of Germany, both before and after Hitler's seizure of power, clearly indicates the forces whose representative he was, forces which merely found their crudest form of expression in him.

In our view a more embracing theory is required to explain the forces which made possible the establishment of the dictatorship, enabled it to maintain itself and guided the course of its further development.

The "party-struggle" theory, in a vulgarized and popularized form, was known as the "Fascist" theory. Men whispered to each other—but never in the presence of a third party—that there was only one Fascist in the Soviet Union—Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

(13) *The Bonapartist Theory*

This theory was in reality only a popular variation of the "party-struggle" theory. It emphasized Stalin's personal ambition, his pleasure in his own glorification, his encouragement of nationalism and patriotism, though he was a foreigner in the State he led, just as Napoleon had been. Some people, particularly old party members and officers, over-simplified matters to the extent of crediting him with outright monarchical ambitions.

The wide circulation of this theory showed how unnatural Stalin's position of power seemed to the broad mass of the people.

(14) *The Caesarean Persecution-Mania Theory*

The Caesarean persecution-mania theory, which was naturally only discussed in whispers in the prisons, illustrated the extent to which the Soviet public regarded the purges as extraordinary and politically unmotivated. It was recalled that when a fantastic amount of power had been concentrated in the hands of one person, such as the Roman Emperors, Ivan the Terrible or Philip II of Spain, the autocrat had often developed acute symptoms of pathological persecution mania, causing him to mistrust even his closest supporters. This had led to the taking of the most fantastic measures to ensure the autocrat's security. A parallel was drawn with the incredible thoroughness and extent of the security measures with which Stalin and his closest associates surrounded themselves. The measures taken for the protection of the Soviet Government far exceeded those taken by the Tsarist Government, or those normal to other dictatorships.

It was seriously asked whether Stalin had not succumbed to the persecution mania of the Caesars, and it was suggested that the significance of Yezhov lay in the fact that he skilfully played on and exploited Stalin's fear of assassination. By continually "unmasking" fresh "plots" aimed at overthrowing Stalin's power he demonstrated his vigilance and loyalty to his master and extended his grip on the country. Yezhov's ambition was not just personal, but had resulted in a tremendous increase in the power of the NKVD, which in practice completely ruled the country.

This theory undoubtedly reflected accurately one aspect of the complicated tangle of facts. If it were true, one would have expected the NKVD apparatus to have controlled the country in enjoyment of complete security itself. But in the section we devoted to the NKVD organization we showed that NKVD control of the country by no means implied the personal security of its own members. Control was exercised, not by the individuals of whom the NKVD consisted, but rather, so to speak, by the NKVD apparatus in the abstract. This remarkable phenomenon of anonymity of power, so typical of the Soviet State, this tyranny of an idea, of an ideocracy, the legitimate successor of the

theocracy of the past, brings us face-to-face with one of the real and essential characteristics of the Soviet system.

(15) *The Theory of Neo-Absolutism*

This theory is, in our opinion, distinguished by its profundity and precise knowledge of Soviet conditions. It comes from the professor of history whose story was told in the last chapter.

His analysis of the present Soviet administrative and economic order started from its close resemblance to the social order of the great Asiatic empires of antiquity and the Middle Ages. He had noticed that a feature of the system prevailing in ancient Egypt at the time of the Ptolemies was that there was no such thing as private ownership of the means of production. Ownership of the means of production resided in the god-king, and to a much lesser extent in the temples. The economy was characterized by a complete wheat monopoly and a monopoly of foreign trade, and cattle rearing and textile and oil production were likewise controlled by the State. The whole population, including overseers, clerks, etc., were legally slaves of the State as embodied in the god-king. Only the temples and the priests serving them enjoyed by tradition a special legal position of their own. This was characterized by a different form of communal ownership.

The great similarity between this and the Soviet system caused us to refer to the latter in our cell conversations as the "Ptolemaic" system of economy when we did not want any third party to know we were criticizing the Soviet Union.

If one divests the idea of "Asiatic despotism" of the flavour of cruelty with which the western European normally associates it, if one ceases to approach it with an attitude of western superiority and remembers, for instance, that the empire of Haroun al Rashid embodied a social system very like that which we have just described, and enjoys a historical reputation of having been a particularly just and well-ordered State into the bargain, one will not be surprised to find that the contemporary Soviet State resembles, at least in one important characteristic, the

Asiatic despotisms which constituted the normal form of State organization during the greater part of oriental history.

This characteristic, common to the Asiatic despotisms and to the contemporary Soviet State, as well as to other modern totalitarian systems, though to a lesser but very definite degree, is that the basis of the power exercised by the ruling group is not ownership of the means of production, but control of them exercised by virtue of office. Whether this control is exercised in the name of the god-king, of the Caliph as the representative of God, or of the all-powerful State as the embodiment of society, is, for our present purpose, immaterial. Most people at the present day are so familiar with the idea that the real basis of power is ownership of the means of production and exchange that they are not aware that in the history of mankind it has only been exercised rather exceptionally and over relatively small areas of the earth's surface. Temple priests and secretaries of party regional committees, emirs of the Caliph and Gauleiters, mandarins and managers, overseers of the Aztec kings and trade union secretaries, have exercised their power only by virtue of office. With loss of office, their power disappears.

In a State of this kind there is a perpetual conflict between the central authority and the groups or classes of society who exercise power by virtue of office-holding. There is also a perpetual conflict between the various office-holding groups themselves. This conflict plays a decisive part in the destiny of these States. On the one hand the central authority tries so far as possible to concentrate power in its own hands, while on the other the office-holders try to assure their power by striving to make their offices hereditary and by seeking to transform their control of the means of production, particularly the soil, into hereditary possession of it, or at least to hold it in fee. Similar antagonism exists between the various grades of official in the bureaucratic State, between the lower and the medium grades and between the medium and the higher.

The people themselves, or at any rate large sections of

them, are the object of the class struggle rather than active participants in it; in other words, they play the part which Marx attributed to the mass of the people, in particular the slaves, in the class struggle between the patricians and plebeians of antiquity; they provide the pedestal on which the battle between the opposing parties takes place.

The history of European feudalism provides a classic example of such a struggle between the central power and the greater and lesser nobility. Land, and the power that went with it, was originally, both theoretically and in practice, held in fee, and remained the property of the central power, which could call it in at any time. But the nobility, as is well known, soon succeeded in transforming the right of control into hereditary right, and in formally transferring the land into its own possession. Not till the end of the Middle Ages, with the growth of a new commercial economy and a powerful urban bourgeoisie, did the central power, relying partly on the increasing strength of the bourgeoisie, partly on the lower ranks of the impoverished nobility, succeed in breaking the power of the great feudal lords and in achieving a new form of rule, absolutism, thereby not only maintaining its power but unexpectedly consolidating it. This struggle, which was concluded in France by Louis XI, in England by Henry VIII, in Spain by Philip II and in Russia by Ivan the Terrible, was distinguished in all countries by its harshness and brutality. One of its essential features everywhere was the alliance between the central authority and the lowest ranks of the people. This was exemplified in Russia, for instance, by the Oprichniki guards, who were "outside society", and in France by Olivier, the "barber-Minister".

The Stalin régime, in its struggle for ever greater concentration of power, must similarly have been faced with opposition from the higher party and State officials. There were various causes for this. In the first place the party still contained representatives of the "Old Guard", remnants of ideological opposition, bound to resent the fact that the structure of the Soviet Union was assuming forms which were not just inconsistent with the revolutionary ideals for which they had fought but were progressively

developing away from the ideals of Socialism. In the second place, these Old Bolsheviks, Red Partisans, and ex-political prisoners included many who, though unfit and unqualified for responsible office, made tremendous claims for themselves on the basis of their past services, and thus stood in the way of a better-qualified new generation. But the immense extent of the purge among the leading groups of the Soviet intelligentzia, party officials, officers and engineers, was not to be explained solely by ideological opposition and the extravagant claims of the "Old Guard".

There was no denying that arrests among party officials were by no means restricted to the "Old Guard". It was plain as early as 1937 that the overwhelming majority of arrested party officials, particularly among the higher ranks, by no means belonged to the "Old Guard" type, and that liquidation was being applied on a far wider scale than would have been justified by "Old Guard" resistance or ideological opposition. The majority of the arrested officials were devoted followers of the party line and belonged to the type of major or minor satrap who had recently been able to enjoy a degree of relative personal prosperity without having any kind of Socialist convictions. It was natural that these people should tend to revive the traditions of the privileged pre-Revolutionary circles at the point at which these had been cut short in 1918; and the tendency was encouraged by the fact that their often smart and beautiful wives in many cases came from what once had been the best society. A new "court" had grown up in the Kremlin, and a new "high society" began to circulate about it, stratified in various degrees, the "high society" of the party, the army, and the NKVD, of the theatre and the films, of technology and science. Special schools, corresponding to the former cadet schools, saw to the upbringing of the younger generation; and suitable posts were found for them in which to start their careers.

The rather old-fashioned, plush-sofa style of this new fashionable world was rather apt to lead the observer astray. The standard of living of even the leading members of this society was more than modest in comparison with that of the petty bourgeoisie or middle classes abroad, and to the

foreign observer seemed positively Spartan. But, in comparison with the general Soviet standard of living, it represented inconceivable luxury.

This society displayed an exclusiveness which had no parallel in capitalist countries. "Good society" was not, so to speak, separated from the rest of the population by a dividing line above which a certain social freedom prevailed. Instead it was divided into a whole system of concentric circles, the members of each of which tried to an ever-increasing degree to cut themselves off from the socially inferior circles below.

This social stratification, the effects of which spread into the minor details of daily life, was nowhere better to be observed than in the sanatoria and convalescent homes of the resorts on the riviera or in the Caucasus in which the high, higher and highest circles spent their leave. An observer infected with the gross plutocratic egalitarianism of the west was apt to find this rigid stratification astonishing to contemplate. The violence of the hatred felt by lower officials towards their superiors, which was later often to be noticed in the cells, would have been unintelligible to anyone unfamiliar with the rigidity of the social divisions, and of the material conditions which went with them. The hatred of all officials felt by the broad masses of the people was naturally just as great, and it was growing; particularly as the principle that all men were equal had been loudly proclaimed for years, as well as the principle that the leading rôle in society belonged to the workers and peasants. The fact that their new masters were almost exclusively of proletarian origin and, therefore, flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood, made the inequalities seem completely unnatural and unjustifiable to them, except in so far as those in positions of authority were distinguished by better education or special achievement.

Side by side with the development of "high society" in the capital, a provincial satraphood started to arise, the pillars of which were the party secretaries and highest officials of the regional committees and of the individual Soviet republics. The Ukrainian newspapers actually started referring to Postyshev, the secretary of the Ukrainian

Communist Party, who incidentally enjoyed a certain personal popularity, especially among schoolchildren, as "Leader of the Ukrainian People", but such eulogy suddenly stopped, obviously after a hint from Moscow. The term "Leader" was subsequently reserved exclusively for Stalin.

The class of officials had thus started to look about for the safeguards of their power which a ruling group invariably needs; and in these circumstances it was intelligible that the central power should decide to do away with them. In doing this Stalin could rely to a certain extent on the sympathy, not only of the great mass of junior party members, especially as the process opened up to many of them an entirely unexpected prospect of a career, but also of the people as a whole, who observed with satisfaction that the downfall of a man living in the extreme of wretchedness could not possibly be so great as that of an exalted comrade. In a speech in 1936 Stalin explicitly stated the theory of the close connection between the ruler and the masses—which is the basic principle of absolutism—by recalling the myth of Antaeus, who lost his strength when his feet were lifted from the ground. The party, he said, and above all its leaders, must never lose their contact with the people.

The numerous receptions given for delegations of Stakhanovites, simple workers and peasants who had achieved exceptional output in agriculture, industry, mining or transport, or had distinguished themselves in military service, also served to stress the close link between Government and people. Stalin regularly attended these receptions, with the Government and party leaders, and they were always reported prominently in the Press. We met in prison some of these people who had been famous for a day, and they told us about these receptions, at which sumptuous fare was provided and the guests frequently grew very merry. Stalin, whose personal way of life, in contrast with that of many of his immediate entourage, was said always to have remained simple and modest, incidentally always behaved in a very sociable and comradely manner.

The theory of neo-absolutism regards the events of the Yezhov period as a revolution by the lower against the higher ranks of the party; the central authority, embodied in Stalin and the very small number of people constituting his immediate entourage, relied on the lower ranks of the party as well as on the masses of the people to maintain its power.

This theory seems to us to contain a great deal of truth. Its special merit seems to us to be that it accurately reflects the passive rôle played by the people, and more specifically that it recognizes the decisive forces at work; on the one hand the supreme leadership striving to maintain itself in power, and on the other the efforts of the class of officials to establish its privileges and its permanence on a basis more secure than the fleeting occupation of official positions —in other words, to establish itself as a proper social class.

The course of events after the Yezhov period was over produced a certain amount of evidence which seemed to support this theory. No local "leaders" of, say, Postyshev's prominence in the Ukraine have since appeared. The functions of the dozen principal People's Commissariats in which the power of the State was previously concentrated were divided up, and they were replaced by a Ministerial Council on which nearly a hundred Ministries were represented. The result is an amorphous administrative structure which has no parallel in the history of modern government. A similar process of breaking up into small entities was discernible in the party Central Committee. Concentrations of power on the previous scale are now clearly impossible.

But a weakness of this theory appears to us to be that, apart from these not very fundamental changes in State administration, the characteristics of a real revolution, namely radical alterations in the social structure, were lacking in the events of the Yezhov period. The phase of development in the thirties which immediately preceded the Yezhov period possessed such characteristics, in that it established a rigid new system of power, privilege and control in place of the power and property relationships which it displaced. But the Yezhov period involved no further alteration in the structure of the State; it merely

involved changes in the personnel who filled the offices, though these changes were admittedly of a very radical nature. The process merely put new satraps and nabobs into the old posts; the posts themselves lost little or nothing of their importance. The new men were bound to have the same interests as the old; they were bound immediately to start all over again the same struggle towards the same goal —the struggle to ensure the permanence of their positions of power.

This weakness of the theory of neo-absolutism is in some ways cancelled out by the theory of "social supply".

(16) *The Theory of Social Supply*

This theory, occasionally known as the conveyor-belt theory, or more lightheartedly the theory of the grove of Aricia, arose out of long discussion by the authors in an NKVD cell.

Sir J. G. Frazer ascribes great importance in *The Golden Bough* to a custom observed throughout Roman antiquity at the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, near Aricia, whose priest, generally a runaway slave, could only succeed to the post by slaying his predecessor. It was an unenviable position, because candidates followed each other in rapid succession. But, however short was their term of office, there was never a lack of fresh aspirants.

In the last section we identified the Bolshevik State organization in the thirties as one in which control of the means of production was exercised by officials whose power did not depend upon ownership. This theory has close connections with the ideas of Burnham, who sees in the history of the last few decades the development of a new class of "managers", not only in the Soviet Union, but also in the Fascist dictatorships of the Continent and even in the trend towards a planned economy in Britain. The characteristic of this "manager" class is that it controls the means of production without owning them; it does so by virtue of its members' appointments to office. Class rule by the "managers" would no doubt find adequate political expression in a bureaucratic State, tendencies towards which are perceptible in all the above-mentioned systems; in the

Bolshevik State it has found full expression, though not necessarily in an inevitable form.

We do not wish to discuss here the general correctness or otherwise of Burnham's extremely interesting theories, but we propose to consider their application to Russian Communism in connection with the theory we are now putting forward, and to develop them in several directions.

In the first place the expression "manager" does not seem appropriate to us in the case of Russian Communism; it implies the availability of an amount of technical knowledge, intelligence and skill such as simply does not exist in the Soviet Union today. Tendencies in this direction were certainly discernible. But every teacher at a university could very soon detect the type of student destined for a successful Soviet career. This was the "political activist" type, who made the most noise at the "criticism and self-criticism" meetings and distinguished themselves more by their "social work" than by their thirst for knowledge or technical skill.

We do not wish to be misunderstood. In the stirring years of the Revolution and the first Five-Year Plan enthusiastic young students were frequently to be met with who honourably combined a tremendous thirst for knowledge with an equally tremendous enthusiasm for the cause of Socialist construction. These young people worked wonders in the face of the most difficult conditions, and many succeeded in rising to important technical posts. But this is not the type we are referring to. Later, in the course of the purge, many of them found their way to prison; it was they who were sacrificed to the deep distrust of idealistic motives which we have so frequently mentioned.

The type which provided the successors to the real party aristocracy was the active organizer type. This type—and not in the Soviet Union alone—tended to receive a general rather than a technical education, and this tendency was intensified in the special conditions prevailing in Soviet universities, though they by no means constituted the majority of the students. The holders of the real position of power are not recruited from the technical intelligentzia, but from a special party-administrator type, which is differentiated very early in its career from the technical

intelligentzia, which is completely subordinate to it. Technicians and engineers who are party members are, of course, to be found in high positions, but they owe their advancement less to their technical qualifications than to their position in the party.

All the same the ruling group has a constantly growing need of scientific and technical qualifications, at least as a label, and this provides great opportunities for scientists, now and in the future. One should not let oneself be led astray by the fact that many older men of learning, particularly academicians, are to be found in apparently very important political positions, *e.g.*, as members of local or central Soviets, in spite of their personal political attitude or past, or that they appear to exercise great influence because of the position of the Academy of Sciences. So far as politics are concerned, all these people are mere puppets, all of whose actions and utterances are controlled and guided by technically far less qualified "deputy directors" or "secretaries" furnished by the party or the NKVD.

Furthermore, we have seen in an earlier section that, in spite of the adoption of the dogma of revolutionary Socialism, the form of control exercised in this modern, bureaucratic, totalitarian State in its power relationships has come involuntarily to resemble that of an oriental, bureaucratically controlled despotism, modified by the adoption of modern methods of production, technical aids, and methods of guiding the masses; and the god-king has been replaced by the abstract idea of the State, the omnipotence of which has recently been formally proclaimed, in spite of Marx's and Lenin's specific doctrine about its "withering away" in a Socialist society.

One of the essential characteristics of a ruling class is continuity and heredity in the holding of positions of power, and we see no trace of this among the ruling officials of the Soviet Union. We have noted the efforts made by this group to establish itself as a real class and to acquire the safeguards necessary for this by a monopoly of education, nepotism and other means. This provided one of the impulses decisive to Soviet development. But we have also noted the forces which arose opposing such a development—the desire for

social advancement of the lower ranks of the party intelligentzia and of the masses themselves—and we saw that these forces were vigorously supported by the absolutist masters of the State.

In every bureaucratic State of the past in which power went with office the group of office-holders has had to fight for safeguards against the despotic power before being able to transform itself into a permanent aristocracy and transform positions of temporary control into permanency. This it achieved *via* the indirect routes of feudalism or financial power. Absolutism, which is based on an alliance between the head of the State and the lowest levels of society, is on the whole not a sufficient safeguard against the development of real class rule. But history provides a whole series of examples of bureaucratic States which have adopted safeguards which, if they have not prevented the development of a feudal class, have at least imposed restraints and checks on it and thereby maintained their own specific structure. One very effective means to this end was the celibacy of the clergy, which was essential for the idea of the *civitas Dei*, so important in the Middle Ages. Admittedly in the long run it ceased to be effective, and high clerical positions were filled by the younger sons of noble families. But the idea of clerical celibacy seems to us to have arisen less from the spirit of Christian asceticism than from the tendency to uphold the personal bureaucratic character of the temporal power of the Church and to avoid tempting the lords of the Church into establishing themselves as a hereditary class.

The Chinese Empire, as is well known, for several thousand years selected its senior officials by submitting them to three State examinations which could be passed by anyone with sufficient industry and intelligence. A candidate who passed the examinations was assured of high office. Chinese literature is full of stories in which the hero is a poor student of humble origin, who is preparing for the State examinations in spite of every conceivable difficulty. Such scholar-heroes in China are as frequent as warrior-heroes in the west. The passing of the Chinese State examinations required no knowledge of administration, but

required a most minute knowledge of the classics—in short, a very high cultural level. They were a safeguard adopted by the mandarin State for the purpose of protecting itself against the possibility that higher officialdom, which had all the positions of power in its hands, might develop into a compact, feudal ruling class. In the end, of course, the emergence of a genuine aristocracy, as a result of the monopoly in education, was inevitable. But for many centuries the State examinations proved to be an effective means of keeping exploitation by the ruling class within bounds and of giving it repeated infusions of new blood.

Soviet society, in which power lay in the hands of a body of officials thrown up by the revolutionary masses, found itself faced in the thirties with the same problem. Purely ideological ties and the very modest maximum salary originally imposed on party members, of whom extra duties were expected without any compensating privileges, had turned out to be entirely inadequate. The new caste of officials set about fully enjoying the material advantages that went with the control of socialized property. This caste, which was not yet one generation old, had no opportunity of constituting itself a real ruling class. Also it was under pressure from the masses of party members who were pushing up from below and were envious of the privileges of their superiors. The central power saw the position clearly, detected a threat to its own security in the development of a new mandarin caste, and nothing was more obvious than to embark on the liquidation of all these people.

It was a brilliant stratagem. It left the social structure of the bureaucratic State untouched. The successors of the deposed and arrested dignitaries unquestioningly set about enjoying the privileges which went with their predecessors' offices; they moved into their flats and took over their staffs. The prospect of a dazzling career opened before a multitude of minor officials who would otherwise have had to wait decades for promotion. However, membership of the ruling caste involved a tremendous degree of insecurity. This had an invaluable effect on the masses. No one envied the mandarins a life which entailed having two small suitcases in perpetual readiness—one in the office and one at home—

containing blankets, provisions and other things that would be necessary in the event of arrest.

True, what happened did not exactly correspond with the procedure at the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis. Each priest at Aricia had to slay his predecessor with his own hands, but not so the Soviet official, for whom the NKVD played the part of providence. Nevertheless the intervention of providence might be hastened by writing "vigilant" letters to the special section—this was expected, nay, demanded of one—by taking an active part in the *prorabotka* meetings, by constant class vigilance and "criticism".

The capitalist society of the nineteenth century and the democratic form of government associated with it offered incentives and opportunities of social advancement in another way. The acquisition of wealth in itself provided a share of power, and politics provided another outlet for the ambitious—the polling-booth could be the way to a position of authority. True, the great crises of capitalism in increasing measure deprived the masses of the people of these possibilities of advancement. As soon as a crisis was overcome new and greater possibilities opened to those who had survived the battle of economic competition. In reality the economic consequences of the crises of capitalism were exactly parallel to the social supply mechanism we have described in the Soviet bureaucratic State. The bankrupt *entrepreneurs* and business people left by the wayside after every capitalist crisis made room for the social advancement of new people, and brought about a change of personnel within the framework of the ruling class without altering the social structure or affecting class relationships. Capitalist crises also occurred in cycles. The overcoming of each crisis made room for new expansion, and was followed by another period of quiet recovery. The periodical "supply" crises in the Soviet Union provide an exact parallel. The bureaucratic State, in spite of its Socialist ideology, provides no "natural" outlet for the drive to social advancement which might be satisfied if personal enrichment could lead to a share of power. The road to influence through political activity, in the sense of taking part in competitive political elections, is also blocked. Its place is taken by "social"

activity, "criticism" of superiors, making a display of political ambition and competing in the struggle for office, and above all by acquiring education and special qualifications as a means to social advancement.

The preferential position of the party intelligentzia in the Soviet State results in tremendous competition for the intellectual professions. Entry into a university or a technical or scientific institute in practice guarantees a more or less assured career. The Soviet Union is very proud of its enormous need of intellectual workers. The relative accessibility of these professions, the chance of social advancement which went with education, was the one thing which in the thirties reconciled the Soviet masses to the hardships of Soviet life.[1]

Though the majority of the victims of the purges by no means belonged to the intelligentzia, the intelligentzia was far more drastically affected than their numbers in proportion to the total population justified. The purges created room. In other countries besides the Soviet Union there exists a big excess supply of intellectual workers. In Russia, innumerable doctors, technicians, administrators, people who have lifted themselves above the mass of unskilled labour, are to be found in the forced labour camps and contribute to the vast reservoir of manual labour which these armies of forced workers represent. The comparison with the conveyor belt, which was made by all prisoners, is completely justified in this context. It is a social conveyor belt. An individual lifts himself out of the ruck, rises, and falls back into it again, and he is thereby prevented from providing himself and his family with an assured existence, which is one of the essential characteristics of membership of a ruling class.

The supply mechanism of the Soviet State thus carries out the regenerative task of capitalist crises and capitalist competition, and at the same time ensures constant change

[1] This situation changed later. Shortly before the war the Government grants automatically awarded to all students on matriculation were stopped and fees were enforced at universities, technical schools and even secondary schools. This to a large extent confined higher education to the children of better-off citizens.

of personnel throughout the ruling caste, with the exception of those at the summit.

The social hatred of those lowest in the scale, the resentment of the exploited towards their exploiters, is most dangerous when it has something visible and concrete on which to fasten. In the Soviet Union it has nothing on which to fasten. So long as the social supply mechanism functions, there is no permanent group of people, corresponding to the nobility or the bourgeoisie in a feudal or capitalist State, at whom it can be directed. The small permanent group which shares the supreme power is relatively easy to protect, particularly as the continual changes at the level immediately below it prevent any effective gathering of strength which might be turned against it.

It would, of course, be naïve to imagine Stalin sitting in his exalted den and consciously and with Machiavellian cunning thinking out this subtle scheme for securing the stability of his régime. The most varied political, personal and psychological motives may have provided the immediate occasion for every single "supply" wave. But we believe there are social causes which favour the occurrence of such "supply" crises in a bureaucratic State, and seem even to make them essential in such a State and cause them to grow to the proportions we have described. It seems to us to provide the only explanation for the strange anonymity of the system, and for the setting up of a permanent ruling class as an idea and not as a definite group of people, as expressed in the fact that even the NKVD, as the instrument of that policy, is not immune from purges.

We therefore believe that the events of the Yezhov period do not represent a unique and never-to-be-repeated phenomenon in Soviet history; on the contrary, they were only a particularly gross example of a process typical and perhaps inevitable in the Soviet bureaucratic State. The Yezhov purge has been over for a long time now, and there has been no purge of similar dimensions since, but every single Soviet citizen in all his dealings instinctively counts on the possibility of a repetition of the phenomenon. At the same time it is perfectly possible that the workings of the supply mechanism, which erupted in sudden, catastrophic

fashion in the Yezhov period, may in future be directed into more peaceful, more regular and smoother channels. But against it there are ranged all the powerful forces of the group now occupying the positions of power, all of them fighting to retain their positions. In every State known to us these forces have in the end gained the upper hand.

Many of the officials appointed at the end of the Yezhov period are still in office to-day. This may be connected with the fact that a purge on the 1936–38 scale turned out to be an extremely dangerous undertaking, and resulted in an almost irreparable loss of political, military, technical and scientific ability. On the other hand it may be that the war and the subsequent territorial expansion of the Soviet Union threw open great new fields of activity to the forces pressing upwards from below—military activity, reconstruction and the assimilation of vast new areas into the Soviet system. Nevertheless a great deal has happened in the years since the end of the Yezhov period. The new members of the ruling caste have entrenched themselves more firmly than any of their predecessors.

There is evidence that the Soviet Government has been deliberately avoiding the horror of another general purge. The abolition of the death penalty, the demonstratively mild treatment of people who had been publicly criticized, and many other signs pointed to an intention to give the supply mechanism more peaceful, more orderly or—to use the Soviet terminology—more "cultural" forms. But the mechanism itself has never ceased to function, nor have the silent removals and dismissals, the "siftings" and expulsions from the party, the arrests and deportations. The number of forced labourers has been made up and maintained from the most varied sources—from real and alleged collaborators, from unreliable populations, from the refractory sections of the conquered and assimilated nations, from released prisoners of war, from Russians who had been forced to work for the Germans, and prisoners of war of other nationalities, though the wastage by mortality has not been small.

The outcome of this trial of strength, with the ruling group of officials straining to become a permanent mandarin

aristocracy on the one hand, with the lower party masses pressing upwards on the other, while the supreme rulers exploit the struggle between them to maintain their own position, is far from certain. The supply mechanism may go on functioning relatively quietly for a long time to come. But one cannot exclude the possibility, particularly if opportunities for foreign expansion decline, or if difficulties crop up in the assimilation of the newly conquered territories, which are still in the "New Economic Policy" stage, or if large sections of the army are affected by contact with non-Soviet conditions, that it may lead to another and no less violent crisis. The danger of war might play a very big part in this; it was the danger of war that provided the immediate occasion for the Yezhov purge.

Whatever the outcome may be, we have been concerned here to show that, precisely because of this strange human supply system, the Soviet bureaucratic State represents a logical, stable and coherent system, and to point out the forces which determine its development.

(17) *The Asia Theory*

In conclusion one very widespread theory, which is to be met with in every conceivable form and variation, but which we shall briefly call the Asia theory, will engage our attention. It is common in Russia, particularly among foreigners, and is often to be encountered abroad. It is as follows. Russia belongs to Asia, not to Europe. As a consequence of centuries of oppression under the Tartar yoke, the barbaric rule of the boyars and the unrestricted autocracy of the Tsar, Russia has never known political liberty. Therefore modern Socialism, a product of the western European mind, did not lead to political freedom after its victory in Russia, but assumed violent and barbaric, *i.e.*, Asiatic forms, which are not a peculiarity of the prevailing social system but of the Russian national character.

It is interesting that this theory is advocated both by British Conservatives and by British Communists. Mr. Churchill's remark that the frontier of Asia now lies on the Elbe expresses this viewpoint. The same idea prevails—as a mental reservation if not openly admitted—among nearly

all honestly convinced Communists and supporters and admirers of the Soviet system outside the Soviet Union, from simple workers to men of learning and distinction. "If only Communism were victorious on a world scale," these people say to themselves, "or at least on an all-European scale, if only the centre of gravity of a Communist continent, stretching from Kamchatka to Gibraltar, from Canton to Dublin, were shifted to Paris or London, all the 'minor mistakes' and drawbacks due to the Russian character of Communism would disappear. Then we should have a chance of carrying out our own ideas, and of bringing into being a western, truly democratic Communism, and the system, which in itself is sound, would automatically shed all its totalitarian characteristics."

A special variation of this theory also exists in Russia itself, and some of the old Russian intellectuals are particularly fond of it. These people point out that Stalin is not a real Russian at all, but a wild Caucasian, and they make fun of his Georgian accent. The brutality of the Bolshevik system in general, and of the purges in particular, are ascribed to the national characteristics of a member of a cruel people. The Georgians are, however, noted for their mildness and gentleness, and moreover they are a civilized people, with an ancient civilization, more ancient and richer in tradition than that of many other European countries, including Russia. When this is pointed out Stalin is represented to be a descendant of the North Ossetic mountaineers, or to be of Tartar extraction.

To check the assumptions of this Asia theory, let us first examine a little more closely a few widespread historical and geographical myths.

There can be no doubt that the great Asiatic empires were the cradle of our whole western civilization. How then shall we account for this strange "Asia myth", the myth of the contrast between the barbarism of Asia and the civilization of Europe? It is as old as Herodotus. This is all the more remarkable as the real source of classical civilization was less the Greek peninsula than the little Ionian city-States of Asia Minor, whose economic prosperity and cultural flowering was entirely due to the

suzerainty of the great Asiatic Persian Empire. The provincial self-conceit of the Greek *polis* and its small-town hostility to the great centralized Persian Empire gave rise to the Asia myth, which contains, of course, a grain of truth; it represented the opposition of urban democracy and individualism to the large-scale, centralized administration of the Asiatic despots. But in the conflict between the Greek democratic city-State and the Asiatic despotic empire savagery and brutality were by no means peculiar to the latter, as will be readily admitted when one recalls the acts of brutality committed by the former, and in particular the institution of the *tyrannis*, which sprang up on democratic soil. The Asia myth was, however, enshrined in the classics and revived by the humanists of the Renaissance; and so was handed down and has survived in our own schoolbooks to the present day.

Another grain of truth in the Asia theory is the resemblance to which we have drawn attention between the Communist bureaucratic State and the ancient Asiatic despotisms. But this resemblance was in the control of the means of production, *i.e.*, was a social and not a geographical phenomenon, and would apply equally if a Communist bureaucratic State were established in western Europe or America. The ancient American civilizations in Peru and Mexico displayed the same characteristics.

The myth of the Tartar yoke is even more firmly entrenched than the Asia myth. The Mongol campaign of conquest at the beginning of the thirteenth century undoubtedly brought much suffering and horror in its wake, as military campaigns have always done. But the suffering and horror inflicted by the Mongols did not exceed, indeed were scarcely comparable with, those inflicted by a more or less simultaneous campaign, in which the representatives of western European civilization overwhelmed Byzantium to set up the Latin Empire. This was the darkest period in the history of Byzantine civilization. Even patriotic modern Russian historians cannot deny that in the clash of two cultures the Tartars represented the higher. Tartar rule was thoroughly mild and tolerant. The result of the restriction of regional, feudal conflicts, a centralized administrative

system and the consequent encouragement of commerce gave the conquered areas all kinds of advantages which far outweighed the low taxes and dues exacted by the Tartar khans. Moreover, the Tartar rulers did not interfere in the slightest in the internal affairs of the areas they subdued; they confined themselves to the collection of tribute and taxes. Representatives of the Tartar régime were to be found in only a very few cities, and during its last hundred years the Tartar suzerainty was little more than formal. The inhabitants of territories under the Tartar yoke were allowed complete political and religious liberty.

Many false and inaccurate opinions are prevalent about the Tsars. A distinction must be made between the periods before and after the French Revolution. In regard to the former, apart from a certain lack of order, there was little to distinguish the régime of the Tsars, so far as brutality and cruelty were concerned, from the contemporary régimes in other European countries. Bloody Mary and Philip II can be set against Ivan the Terrible, and Frederick William of Prussia against Peter the Great. The massacre of St. Bartholomew, the Stockholm massacre and the Inquisition have no counterparts in Russian history. The burning of witches was completely unknown in Russia, and the large-scale settlement of Jews in eastern Europe took place because Jews driven from central Europe found asylum in Poland and Russia.

European historians look at Tsarism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against the background of nineteenth-century western liberalism. Relative economic backwardness and the non-existence of a powerful bourgeoisie resulted in the survival of remnants of feudalism for a relatively long time in Russia. Serfdom was not formally abolished till 1861, incidentally only two years later than in Prussia. A parliamentary form of government arose only after the failure of the 1905 revolution. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Russian Tsarism was undoubtedly harsh, measured by the liberal yardsticks of the time, but, taken all in all and compared, say, with the régime in most European countries at the present day, it was extremely mild. Political liberties were restricted, but by and large

nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia was unquestionably a State governed by the rule of law.

There were, of course, numerous evil phenomena incidental to reactionary politics; there were the relics of the privileges of the nobles, Jews were confined to the pale, pogroms—of which the first, incidentally, took place in the eighties—were inspired by reactionary politicians, and there was corruption among minor officials, and a good deal else besides. Yet there was a large and widely-read opposition Press, there were a number of opposition parties, representing the most varied views, and a powerful and critical opposition literature. The individual enjoyed freedom of movement, freedom to choose his occupation, religious freedom, the right to be defended in a court of law, the right to strike, and all nationalities enjoyed equality of rights, with the exception of the above-mentioned restrictions on the Jews. The censorship existed in theory, but had become largely formal in character and was easily evaded. The struggle for bourgeois democratic freedom in the European liberal sense had filled the whole nineteenth century in Russia. This meant that the Russians were fully aware of political liberty, and nothing could be more incorrect than to draw conclusions based on the cultural and political "backwardness" of the Russian people.

Many extraordinary and entirely fantastic ideas are in circulation about the alleged relationship between specific characteristics of the Bolshevik State and the peculiarities of the Russian national character. So much has been written about the depths of the Russian soul and the mystical character of the Russian people, and the alleged relationship of these to Bolshevism, that it is impossible to discuss all the variations of this theory, which connects Bolshevism sometimes with the peculiar mildness of the Russian character, sometimes with its extraordinary cruelty; sometimes the Bolshevik system is connected with the messianic tinge of the Russian soul, or else with its complete rationalism. All we have to say on the subject is that to us the Russian national character seems extraordinarily inadequate as an explanation of the Bolshevik bureaucratic State. If there is anything to be said about the Russian

national character and its relation to the régime, one must admit that the Russians show certain anarchist leanings. We are well aware how superficial and misleading are generalizations of the type: "The Russian is so-and-so." We therefore intend the following to be taken with every reservation and a grain of salt. Subject to this, then, let it be said that the Russian has a deep distrust of, a national disrespect for, government and authority of any kind. He regards it primarily as something alien, something which interferes with his private life. Combined with this is a certain disorderliness and lack of capacity for continuous and sustained effort, to some extent balanced by an extraordinary capacity for rising to a crisis, when he is able to perform remarkable feats.

The last support of the "Asia" theory is the idea of the Russian people as politically backward and immature. What we said above about Russian familiarity with ideas of liberty under the Tsars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries applied, of course, to intellectuals and certain groups of better educated workers. It is certainly true that these people formed a relatively small proportion of the population, and that the great mass of the people remained in a state of political lethargy and on a relatively low level of education and civilization. But events since the February Revolution of 1917 have brought about a tremendous change. The Revolution, and still more the civil war, shook the people out of their lethargy and educated them politically. The increasing political pressure in the later phases of Bolshevik development actually contributed to the political maturity of the masses. Though unable freely to express their political will, they have discovered the connection between the Government's political measures and their social and economic consequences. Every Soviet citizen has to know at any given moment exactly what can be said and what cannot be said without coming into collision with the continually shifting party line. This in itself has contributed substantially to the political maturity of the Russian masses, the extent of which is not generally suspected.

Hand in hand with this somewhat involuntary political training there has been a general rise in the cultural and

educational level. This finds expression, for instance, in the popular attitude to science. The growth of political and cultural maturity, in spite of all material difficulties and the harshness of the régime, involves an increase in the people's demands and requirements and results in ever-increasing criticism of existing social conditions. Taking the long view, the Soviet bureaucratic State is guilty of grave inconsistency, for it specifically condemns the foundation on which it has been built, *i.e.*, the crystallizing out of a privileged caste which rules the masses. The ruling classes in the capitalist States incidentally confronted themselves with the same problem with their policies of compulsory school-attendance and liberal education.

Whether or not the group of bureaucrats succeeds in establishing itself as a new class, in the end the social supply mechanism is bound to turn out inadequate to meet the mounting demands of the masses. In the long run this is a factor tending towards the instability of the régime.

The only counterweight to the growing discontent and demands of the masses that the régime has so far been able to devise has been on the one hand the stimulation and nourishment of the fear of attack from abroad—the fear of "capitalist encirclement"—and on the other the awakening of hopes of expansion and of the victorious propagation of Communism abroad.

THE END